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Beauty & Power

Vanessa Nicole

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PLAYBOY

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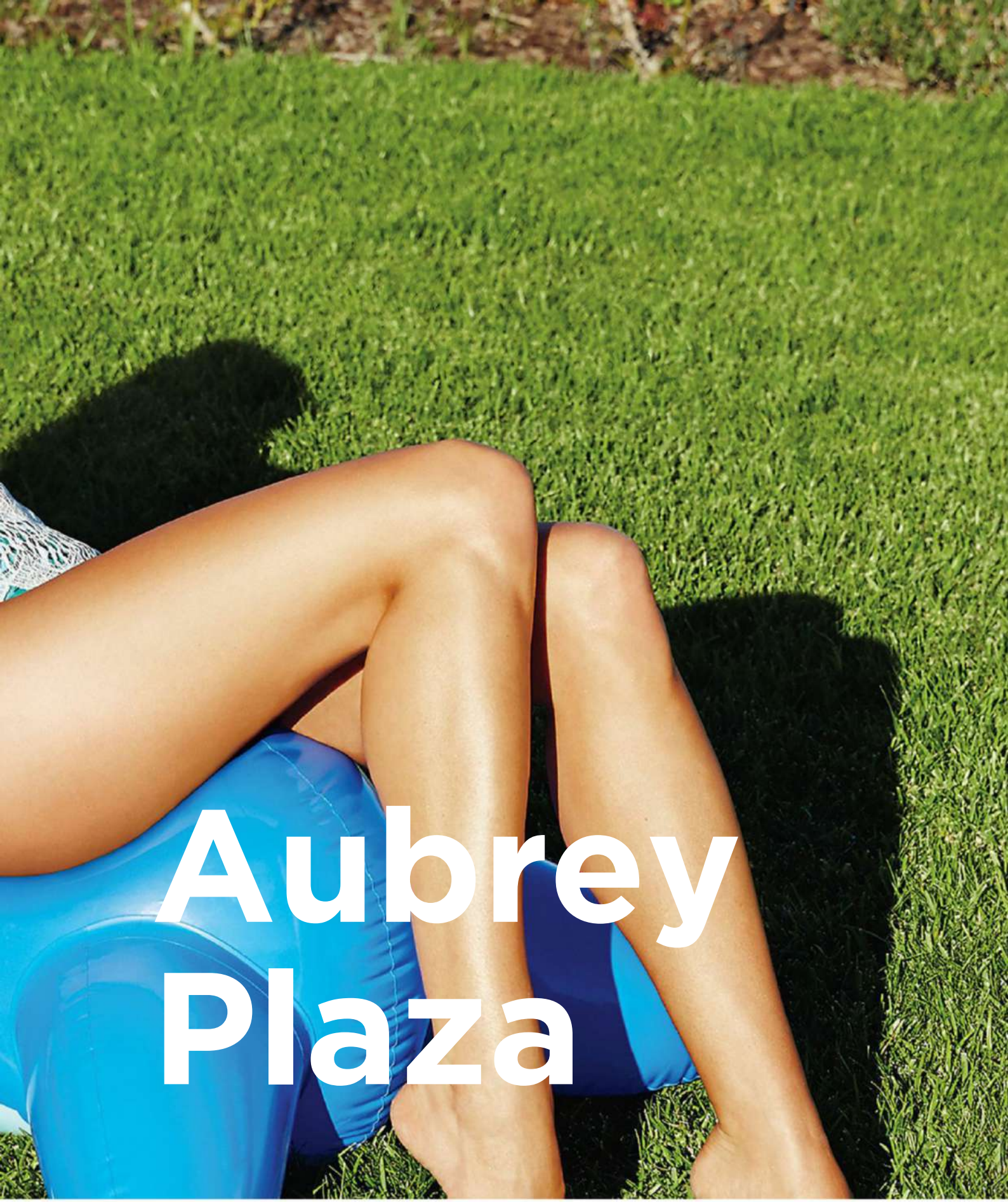
WRITTEN BY **DAVID RENSIN** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **PETER YANG**



Aubrey Plaza

TV's favorite dark princess drops her "Botox deadpan" glare and tells all about Chris Pratt, defends Charlie Sheen and dreams about a life of crime

Q1: *When you began filming the final season of Parks and Recreation, your TV husband, Chris Pratt (who plays Andy), had in real life just anchored last year's biggest movie Guardians of the Galaxy. How did success go to the head of one of the nicest guys around?*

He forgot my name, which is the weirdest thing about the whole situation. I guess when you're the star of a Marvel movie and super, super famous and you're flown all over the world, you meet so many people that your ability to pay attention is gone. So yeah, he forgot my name. I mean my real name, not my character April on the show. I had to keep reminding him, and he'd say, "Oh, right. Right, right." But I don't fault him, because being a movie star is hard. They say that movie stars meet 60 times more people than the average person, so of course your brain gets cloudy. I don't hold that against him. I think he's great. [*laughs*]

None of that is true, by the way. You told me it would be okay to lie. Chris did not forget my name. He's the kindest, most amazing person ever, and he didn't change a bit except that his fucking body is ripped beyond belief. He's the same old lovable golden retriever of a man I had to hug and touch and kiss a lot—because it's my job. I just tried to make the best of it.

Q2: *Here's a question from one of your Parks and Recreation cast mates. "When one examines your talent, beauty and humor, not to mention your excellent many teeth, it is quite apparent that you have entered into a bargain with Lucifer. What services did the Dark Father require of you in exchange for your winning glamours?"*

That's like a backhanded compliment. You're not going to tell me who? Oh, wait, I know. This is from Satan himself, the Dark Lord, Nick Offerman. We have an evil connection. It's a very good question. The Dark Father required many things of me: the blood of a thousand infants, the teeth of a thousand corpses. I have it all written down on my iPad.

Q3: *Does Nick require that you be as fearless as he is when it comes to getting or playing a part?*

Do you mean having sex with people to get a part? We're similar in that way too. He taught me that. He was one of the first people out here who told me you have to have sex with the most people you can, especially the ones who make decisions, and I said okay. You don't even have to confine it to business. Use sex to get whatever you're trying to get.

Q4: *You're TV's modern queen of the deadpan look. Do you have a favorite?*

A dead-eyes stare. No eyebrow movement, no facial creases at all; you just stare right into someone's soul—the Botox deadpan.

Q5: *You're named after a song by Bread. When you think of bread, what kind comes to mind?*

Just a straight-up bag of Wonder Bread. I would never buy that now, but I grew up on it, and SpaghettiOs and hot dogs and stuff like that.

Q6: *You went to an all-girls Catholic high school. Defend single-sex education.*

I loved it. I would send my kid to an all-girls school. Some people say it's no good, that it's not the real world and girls won't learn how to interact normally. I disagree. At that age it was helpful to eliminate the distraction of guys in school. I like uniforms. I didn't have to think about dressing myself or how I looked. I just focused on the important stuff. It made me more confident in the classroom.

Q7: *Is show business conducive to long-term love relationships?*

Oh, God, I don't think so, not from what I can see, and I look very hard for it. I'm curious about that. Whenever I meet a married couple who are in the business, I always ask them a million questions to figure out what's really going on, because

"Twitter's Evil. It's a place for people to bully and be mean to others."

I don't know how that's going to work out. For a successful actor there are lots of choices and temptations. We're all just human. Actors are like con artists. We want to make a memorable impression. Amy Poehler once gave me good advice. She said when someone is charming, it's an action. Charm is a verb, not a quality.

Q8: *You've said that you admire Charlie Sheen and Bill Murray because they're unapologetic about who they are. Do you aspire to be part of that tradition?*

Famous people get lots of stuff projected on them and feel constantly judged. It can take a toll. Charlie and Bill, both of whom I've worked with, don't seem affected by fame or status. They are who they are. I don't even aspire to fame. I just want to work and not let anything else affect me. But I'm only human, so sometimes I care too much—or too little—about what others think.

Q9: *We read that you wanted to play Dr. Bruce "the Hulk" Banner's cousin, superhero She-Hulk. Given all the garment rending, describe her wardrobe options.*

I don't know if I was sober when I said that, but I would like that part. Give it to me. It would be fun to play a sexy scientist who gets really angry and can then do anything she wants. I would like to be wearing a sexy business-casual outfit that rips when I get big and then I'm wearing—I don't know, maybe a sports bra and some boy shorts? Something sporty so I can run around and fuck shit up. Or maybe a slip, some kind of undergarments but keeping it classy.

Q10: *Is it true you once kissed Patrick Stewart on the mouth?*

Yes. He was at the American Comedy Awards. Amy Poehler and I were sitting at the table, and we knew we were going to win for best comedy series, but we were the only people there from our cast. We had to go on stage alone and didn't have a bit—which we realized once the awards were being given out everyone else had. So Amy and I were drinking and trying to figure out what to do, and she came up with the idea to ask a bunch of random people to stand up and go on stage with us and pretend they were in our cast. Patrick was one. He was a really good sport. They called our names, and Amy and I stood up. He stood up. We kissed him on the mouth, held hands and ran up on stage. Amy made a big speech about how Patrick was a writer for our show and they were bumping him up to cast member because he'd been so good. He totally played along and was awesome.

Q11: *When you read mean tweets about yourself, is it no big deal or is it painful?*

I have read tweets in the past, but I've stopped. It bothered me. Twitter is evil. It's a place for people to bully and be mean to others. I think it would bother anyone.

Q12: *Okay, but you're on Twitter.*

Yeah, but not to read about myself. I've created a Twitter persona, @evilhag. That's also how I do talk shows. It's a version of me but not really me. It's a character. Sometimes I'll do a sincere thing, but mostly it's just a waste of my life and my brain energy, so I'm getting off it. Okay? I'm going to get off it right now. I can't do it anymore. [pauses, looks at her iPhone] But I have so many followers. No, it just feels like drugs. But the more followers you get, you're like, Oh, shit, people like me. It feels good. [pauses] I guess I'm not going to quit.

Q13: *You once told Conan O'Brien a story about stealing a paper from the desk of Vice President Joe Biden when he gave you a tour of the White House. How surprised are you that you didn't choose a life of crime?*

Very. If I weren't an actor, maybe I'd be a criminal. I would love to rob a bank. You know, just stickin' it to the man. The rush of the heist. In fact, I might do it—but in an old-timey kind of way, like Bonnie and Clyde. Banks today are probably too hard to rob because they're all futuristic. But I would be the cool robber. I would have a side conversation with the person I'm robbing: "I'm cool. I'm not going to hurt you." I would develop a relationship with them and make them emotionally invested in me. Then I would rob them again.

Q14: *What's your theory of career management?*

Don't trust anyone. Have no loyalty to anyone, no matter who they are. Never do anything for money. Honestly, I just try to make good choices. The most important thing is to focus on the actual art and the work and try to block out all the noise when you're making a decision. I have moments of weakness when I see dollar signs and try to convince myself a certain role could be a good thing for me but I know deep down that it isn't. You have to follow your gut. You can't be distracted by competition and comparing yourself to others.

Q15: *Showers or baths?*

I like to take a bath every day or I feel weird. I like to put some stuff in the water and make a little potion, then zone out. Sometimes I take a shower before I get in, but mostly I just sit there by myself and think about all my regrets and the bad choices I've made.

Q16: *Many of the Parks and Recreation cast have written books: Amy Poehler, Nick Offerman, Aziz Ansari, Rob Lowe. Are you feeling the pressure?*

Well, I am writing a book—of poetry. So everyone can go fuck themselves, because my book will be better than all of their books. I have a title: The Worst Book of Poetry You've Ever Read. I'm not Rob Lowe. I don't have a lifetime of interesting things to say. But if I take Nick's advice and sleep around, maybe I should start making lists.

Q17: *You're half Puerto Rican. When does that part of you come out to play?*

Generally around 6:30 P.M. Before that I'm more Irish. My Puerto Rican side likes the flavor coconut. It likes to party and cook and be late for things. Except for today; I was early for our interview.

Q18: *Who of your comedic peers would you follow around all day if you could?*

Garry Shandling. Anything that comes out of his mouth is funny. Fred Armisen too. I've been obsessed with people before. I've never stalked anyone, but I'm not afraid of that.

Q19: *You appeared on the recently renewed NBC sitcom called Welcome to Sweden. The main character, Amy Poehler's brother Greg, goes to Sweden for love. What would you do for love?*

How do you know this? I basically did that exact thing in my real life. I went to Sweden to find real love, which is why I know how to speak Swedish. When I was in high school I dated a Swedish exchange student, Johan. When you're 16 and in love you think it's the real deal. I was totally obsessed. I started to learn Swedish. I thought I was going to live in Sweden and have Swedish babies. We dated the whole time he was in America, and then he went back to Sweden when the program was over. Technically we never broke up, but over time we lost touch. Mentally, I always went back to him after failed relationships. I'd think, Well, technically Johan and I are still together, because we never really broke up. It was this weird thing in my head. Ten years later, after a breakup, I thought about him again, and it struck me that there could be a really great movie about a girl who dated a Swedish exchange student and goes to Sweden 10 years later to find him. I'd write it. Then I thought, Maybe I should actually do it and write it while I'm doing it. I booked a ticket to Sweden, looked him up online and e-mailed him. He was living in a town called Gothenburg. I totally lied to him and told him it was a work trip. He said, "Great, I'd love to see you. I'll pick you up for dinner." I flew over, rested up, got ready and went downstairs to meet him. He was there with a woman. "This is my girlfriend who I live with," he said. "Oh," I said. "Cool! Great!" The three of us went out to dinner, and it was the worst drunken dinner ever.

Q20: *Last summer you were in the film About Alex, which has been described as a quarter-life-crisis version of The Big Chill. You're 30 now. What was your quarter-life crisis, and how did you get through it?*

My quarter-life crisis is probably happening right this moment. Filming the final season of my show has ended. I have no idea what I'm going to do now. Do I want to live in California or New York or Europe or in the woods? Do I want a baby now or wait until I'm 40? It's said that every seven years your cells regenerate and you become a new person, so it's kind of fitting that Parks and Recreation is a seven-year show, because in so many ways I'm an entirely different person now than when I started. Now I'm totally beaten down by the system, man. Then, I was just a wide-eyed weird New York comedian. Now I'm a jaded L.A. douchebag. [laughs] Now is the first time I'll have a totally clean slate in terms of my schedule. The world is my oyster and I have no idea about anything except that I'm going to go big. I want some shit to happen!

CRAFTED FOR EXCELLENCE

Valentina Cardona

Model **@its_apexvalentina**

Happy to have you on Playboy. Any exciting projects lined up this year? Thank you, it feels iconic to be here. This year is about expansion. I'm building my brand beyond social media into more curated, high-concept visual storytelling. Think elevated aesthetics, intentional collaborations, and stepping into spaces that align with luxury and empowerment.

What part of your journey are you most proud of right now? My evolution. I built my platform from vision and discipline. I'm proud that I stayed authentic while learning how to move strategically. Growth without losing yourself, that's power.

How would you describe your lifestyle in three words right now? Focused. Elevated. Intentional.

What's a lesson you've learned that changed the way you see yourself? That confidence isn't something you wait for; it's something you practice. Once I stopped asking for permission to take up space, everything changed.

Is there a skill or hobby you've recently picked up or want to learn soon? I've been diving deeper into video production and editing. I love having creative control over my narrative.

Next on my list? Learning more about business investments, beauty is powerful, but ownership is unstoppable.

Are there any habits you want to leave behind as you step into a new chapter? Overthinking. The next version of me moves with clarity, not hesitation.

What's one lifestyle change you made this year that completely transformed you? Protecting my energy. I became selective about who and what gets access to me. That boundary alone elevated every area of my life.

What's one lesson from your journey that you wish you'd learned earlier? Not everyone who claps for you is rooting for you. Discernment is a luxury.

Your ideal first date: Something intentional. A rooftop dinner, good wine, slow conversation, chemistry that lingers longer than the night.

Guilty pleasure: Late-night desserts and being underestimated.

What makes you the ultimate partner to have? I'm loyal, ambitious, and deeply passionate. If I choose you, I invest. I believe in building empires, not just moments.

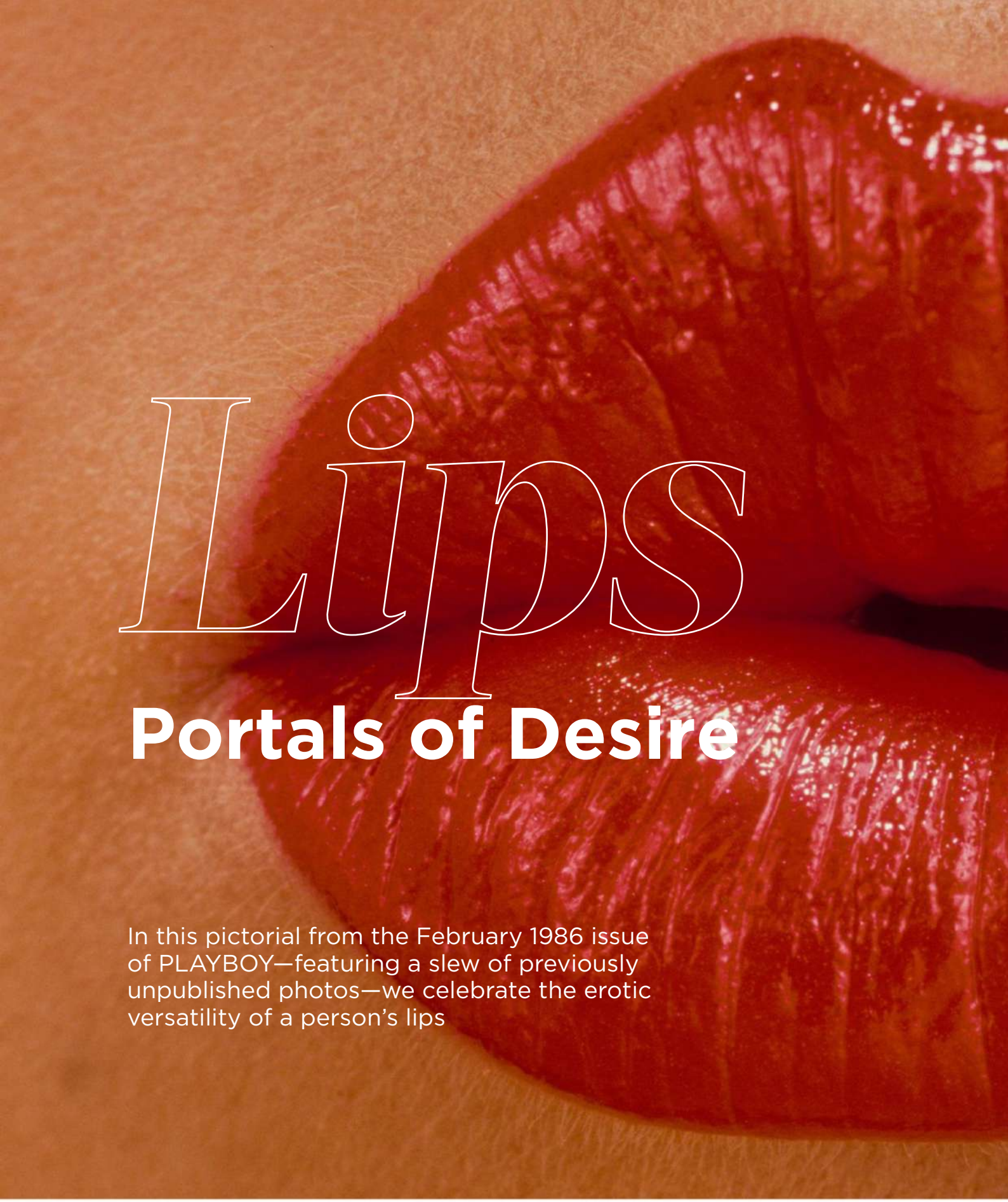
When people look back at this moment in your career, what do you hope it represents about who you are? A woman stepping fully into her power, unapologetic, strategic, and self-made.

What's one goal you didn't hit last year that you're determined to achieve this time? Scaling my brand internationally. This year isn't about going viral; it's about going global.

What new doors or opportunities are you hoping to explore in your career? Luxury collaborations, editorial features, and building a brand that lives beyond platforms, something timeless.

What advice would you give to someone learning to step into their confidence? Stop shrinking. Speak clearly. Walk slower. Own your presence before the world validates it.

Where can our readers catch up with you and stay updated with your work? You can find me on TikTok as @Apex_Valentina and my Gmail: val24cardona@gmail.com. This is just the beginning.



Lips

Portals of Desire

In this pictorial from the February 1986 issue of PLAYBOY—featuring a slew of previously unpublished photos—we celebrate the erotic versatility of a person's lips

WRITTEN BY **THE PLAYBOY EDITORS** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **STEPHEN WAYDA**

Her mouth. Full, juicy, smiling or pouting. Kissing is the greatest act of intimacy. If she nibbles on you, she's making a commitment, confessing a need, asking a question. Lips make promises you hope she'll keep. Her mouth gives you a taste of things to come.

It's time to talk. She calls you late at night. Her voice is drowsy. She's deep in the sheets. Her mouth whispers into the phone. Her breath comes in shudders. She tells you about the things her mouth wants to do to your body. Your imagination is going wild. Whew! It's time for a cigarette.

She's not teasing anymore. The room begins to spin. It's your turn to surrender. She sucks your fingers. Your heart pounds. She's dressed to kill, and she's going to get you. Slowly she unbuttons your shirt. Before you close your eyes, you take a last, lingering look at those incredible lips.

Size Matters

Want to spice up your bedroom routine with lingerie? Make sure you get the right fit with our step-by-step size guide

WRITTEN BY **ANDREW SHAFER** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MICHAEL BERNARD**

"There's gotta be a better way!" It's a refrain uttered by late-night infomercial actors as they clumsily spill soda on their keyboards or foolishly try to chop vegetables using a method other than slapping. And they're not wrong. There often is a better way, whether you want to peel potatoes using only a glove, navigate a lake in a rowboat that has a screen-door floor or simply buy your partner a sexy, properly fitted piece of lingerie.

Lingerie can be confusing. There are chemises and garters and corsets and bustiers. How is a bralette different from a bra? Hooks, straps, belts, cuffs. Wt-actual-f is a merry widow? Cup size or bust size: What's the difference? Shakira told us hips don't lie, but how does that in any way help us determine how many inches they are? This is about the point in the infomercial when the hapless husband would fall down the stairs carrying a drawer full of lacy camisoles, narrowly avoiding a shattered coccyx but stirring up some righteous indignation at the byzantine complexity of lingerie and its sizing.

There's gotta be a better way!

That's where our simple five-step manual for finding your partner's proper lingerie size comes in. The type of lingerie you buy is important, so consult our Language of Lingerie guide to find the one that most titillates you and your partner. (Let's call that Step Zero.) But lingerie type is a matter of personal taste.

What's not subjective is size. Lingerie is meant to make the wearer feel empowered, attractive and desired—and the best way to maximize those self-esteem-boosting feelings in your partner is to give her lingerie that actually fits. So before you buy, bust out your tape measure and do some good-natured snooping.

Step One: Panty Raid

Does she already have some lingerie that fits properly? Perhaps from a saucy bachelorette party, or a baby shower where the host totally misunderstood what a babydoll is, or Valentine's Day 2017 when she was still with that dick Thad who, yes, may have been a generous lover but could never make her laugh the way you do and definitely doesn't respect her the way you do and also what kind of name is Thad anyway and who does he even think he is and—

Where were we? Oh, right. If she already has lingerie that fits well, then you're golden. Simply go to her underwear drawer (or the box in the deep recesses of her closet labeled "Mementos of Thad") and check the tag. Boom—you got the size. If this were a flowchart, you'd be cruising down that line past all the other boxes, straight to the finish.

Step Two: Bust a Move

What if she isn't yet a lingerie owner? The good news: No Thad to worry about in this scenario. The bad news: You'll have to work a little harder to find her size. This subterfuge will be more involved than simply checking a tag, so wait until she's out of the house or thoroughly distracted. Throw on a trench coat, some sunglasses and a fake mustache (if you already have a real mustache, shave it off as a deep commitment to the disguise) and sneak into her bedroom. Or, as an alternative, simply walk into her room like a person who is not a creep or three children stacked on top of each other trying to sneak into an R-rated movie.

Once you're in, start with her bust size. Find a bra she wears often and check the size. The number is her under-bust measurement; the letter is her cup size. To figure out her bust measurement, simply add to the under-bust measurement one inch for every cup size. A is one inch, B is two inches, C is three inches, D is four inches and if you haven't caught on to the pattern yet you should be very thankful you are even in a position to have a woman to buy lingerie for. For example, a 32B bra size means her bust measurement is 34 inches; a 36D means a 40-inch bust measurement. Mazel tov! You measured your first bust.

Step Three: Get Waisted

Next up is the waist measurement. Locate a dress that has a defined waistline. If all she has are flowy Coachella dresses, well, this is going to be harder. Once you've located a proper dress, lay it on a flat surface. With a tape measure, measure the inverted curve area a

few inches below the bust—the waistline, in layman's terms—from one edge of the dress to the other. Double that number to get her waist measurement. If, for example, the dress measures 13 inches across at the waistline, her waist measurement is 26 inches.

Step Four: Her Hips Adhere to the Truth at All Times

Bust: Check. Waist: Check. The final measurement you'll need is her hips. Find a pair of jeans she wears often. Zip and button them—basically, the opposite of what you're trying to accomplish with this lingerie purchase—and lay them on a flat surface. The hip area is about an inch and a half below the bottom of the zipper—a.k.a. the general area a woman's hips are located.

Measure the jeans from edge to edge across that hip area, and then, using the same rigorous mathematical formula from the waist section, double it. If the jeans are 18 inches across, the hip measurement is 36 inches; if they're 19 inches across, the hip measurement is 38 inches; if the hips leave Prague at 7 P.M. traveling at 60 mph and other hips leave Prague at 11 P.M. traveling in the same direction at 90 mph, the second hips will catch up in eight hours. Math!

Step Five: Size It Up

Now that you have her measurements, put all her clothes back precisely as you found them so she'll be none the wiser. Or really throw her off the trail by ransacking the place and then weaving an outlandish—but just believable enough—story about a crafty family of possums that broke into your house and wreaked havoc.

Whichever of those two equally viable options you choose, it's finally time to buy the lingerie. With her measurements in hand, it's quite easy to determine her size. Most lingerie companies provide a size chart on their website, so simply consult the chart to find the size that corresponds with her measurements. (Each product is unique, so make sure to check the size chart for each item you purchase.) If she falls between sizes, always go a size up.

Now that you have the right lingerie for the right partner, it's time to work on the final step: enjoy.

The Language of Lingerie

An erotic guide to all things silky and sheer

WRITTEN BY **THE PLAYBOY EDITORS** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MICHAEL BERNARD**

We all know men are enchanted by a woman in lingerie, but most are flummoxed as to exactly why. Men tend not to talk of frills, lace or silk, but on a beautiful woman it's a language they instantly speak. To explore this conundrum, we decamped with a Victoria's Secret photographer and two beautiful women. We brought trunks of silk stockings, garter belts, corsets, camisoles and other diaphanous delicates to both conceal and reveal the beauty of the female form. Below, you'll witness what we uncovered and learn what you need to know to help you the next time you're in the market for something unmentionable for the woman—or women—in your life.

En Garter

Garter belts keep thigh-high stockings from sliding down. Unclipping them adds to the drama of the moment, underscoring the fact that all lingerie is a puzzle of sorts, a mystery that leads to the question: How does this thing come off, and who is going to do it?

Bare Necessities

A woman's beauty is at its purest without excessive adornment and unnecessary layers. A diamond choker brings out the sparkle in her eyes. Simple thigh-high stockings in basic black cover just enough but don't distract.

Stocking Options

Black thigh-high stockings highlight the curves of a leg, leaving just a flash of skin at the top. While the long seam down the back is an old-fashioned flourish in this day and age, the way it traces the exquisite contour of the thigh and calf is an anachronism to be embraced. Slip-on heels are designed to be kicked off.

Stay the Corset

The corset is the most powerful piece of lingerie. And if the art of the striptease is about the delayed reveal, the corset is the ultimate in access denied—albeit momentarily. Until access is granted, the garment's structured shape accentuates the svelte hourglass contours of the torso. It can be kinky, it can be empowering, but above all it can be a dare to both people to continue to figure out their roles in the game that ensues.

Heel

A good pair of stiletto pumps adds height and conveys power. The high heels push the hips back and the calves out. Shoes can count as a sort of lingerie in their own right.

You Are Sheer

A lace robe or camisole represents everything we love about lingerie. It can be kinky or innocent, depending on how a woman wears it. Above all, it's transparent.

Playboy Interview

John Lennon and Yoko Ono

A candid conversation with the reclusive couple about their years together and their surprisingly frank views on life with and without the Beatles

INTERVIEW BY **DAVID SHEFF** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **TOM ZUK**

To describe the turbulent history of the Beatles, or the musical and cultural mileposts charted by John Lennon, would be an exercise in the obvious. Much of the world knows that Lennon was the guiding spirit of the Beatles, who were themselves among the most popular and profound influences of the 1960s, before breaking up bitterly in 1970. Some fans blamed the breakup on Yoko Ono, Lennon's Japanese-born second wife, who was said to have wielded a disproportionate influence over Lennon, and with whom he has collaborated throughout the 1970s. In 1975, the Lennons became unavailable to the press, and though much speculation has been printed, they emerged to dispel the rumors—and to cut a new album—only a couple of months ago. The Lennons decided to speak with PLAYBOY in the longest interview they have ever granted. Freelance writer David Sheff was tapped for the assignment, and when he and a PLAYBOY editor met with Ono to discuss ground rules, she came on strong: Responding to a reference to other notables who had been interviewed in PLAYBOY, Ono said, "People like Carter represent only their country. John and I represent the world." But by the time the interview was concluded several weeks later, Ono had joined the project with enthusiasm. Here is Sheff's report:

"There was an excellent chance this interview would never take place. When my contacts with the Lennon-Ono organization began, one of Ono's assistants called me, asking, seriously, 'What's your sign?' The interview apparently depended on Yoko's interpretation of my horoscope, just as many of the Lennons' business decisions are reportedly guided by the stars. I could imagine explaining to my PLAYBOY editor, 'Sorry, but my moon is in Scorpio—the interview's off.' It was clearly out of my hands. I supplied the info: December 23, three P.M., Boston.

"Thank my lucky stars. The call came in and the interview was tentatively on. And I soon found myself in New York, passing through the ominous gates and numerous security checkpoints at the Lennons' headquarters, the famed Dakota apartment building on Central Park West, where the couple dwells and where Yoko Ono holds court beginning at eight o'clock every morning.

"Ono is one of the most misunderstood women in the public eye. Her mysterious image is based on some accurate and some warped accounts of her philosophies and her art statements, and on the fact that she never smiles. It is also based—perhaps unfairly—on resentment of her as the sorceress/Svengali who controls the very existence of John Lennon. That image has remained through the years since she and John met, primarily because she hasn't chosen to correct it. So as I removed my shoes before treading on her fragile carpet—those were the instructions—I wondered what the next test might be.

"Between interruptions from her two male assistants busy screening the constant flow of phone calls, Yoko gave me the once-over. She finally explained that the stars had, indeed, said it was right—very right, in fact. Who was I to argue? So the next day, I found myself sitting across a couple of cups of cappuccino from John Lennon.

"Lennon, still bleary-eyed from lack of sleep and scruffy from lack of shave, waited for the coffee to take hold of a system otherwise used to operating on sushi and sashimi—'dead fish,' as he calls them—French cigarettes and Hershey bars with almonds.

"Within the first hour of the interview, Lennon put every one of my preconceived ideas about him to rest. He was far more open and candid and witty than I had any right to expect. He was prepared, once Yoko had given the initial go-ahead, to frankly talk about everything. Explode was more like it. If his sessions in primal-scream therapy were his emotional and intellectual release 10 years ago, this interview was his more recent vent. After a week of conversations with Lennon and Ono separately as well as together, we had apparently established some sort of rapport, which was confirmed early one morning.

"'John wants to know how fast you can meet him at the apartment,' announced the by-then-familiar voice of a Lennon-Ono assistant. It was a short cab ride away and he briefed me quickly: 'A guy's trying to serve me a subpoena and I just don't want to deal with it today. Will you help me out?' We sneaked into his limousine and streaked toward the recording studio three hours before Lennon was due to arrive. Lennon told his driver to slow to a crawl as we approached the studio and instructed me to lead the way inside, after making sure the path was safe. 'If anybody comes up with papers, knock them down,' he said. 'As long as they don't touch me, it's okay.' Before I left the car, Lennon pointed to a sleeping wino leaning against the studio wall. 'That could be him,' Lennon warned. 'They're masters of disguise.' Lennon high-tailed it into the elevator, dragging me along with him. When the elevator doors finally closed, he let out a nervous sigh and somehow the ludicrousness of the morning dawned on him. He broke out laughing. 'I feel like I'm back in "Hard Day's Night" or "Help!"' he said.

"As the interview progressed, the complicated and misunderstood relationship between Lennon and Ono emerged as the primary factor in both of their lives. 'Why don't people, believe us when we say we're simply in love?' John pleaded. The enigma called Yoko Ono became accessible as the hard exterior broke down—such as the morning when she let out a hiccup right in the middle of a heavy discourse on capitalism. Nonplused by her hiccup, Ono giggled. With that giggle, she became vulnerable and cute and shy—not at all the creature that came from Japan to brainwash John Lennon.

"Ono was born in 1933 in Tokyo, where her parents were bankers and socialites. In 1951, her family moved to Scarsdale, New York. She attended Sarah Lawrence College. In 1951, Yoko was married for the first time, to Toshi Ichiyanagi, a musician. They were divorced in 1964 and later that year, she married Tony Cox, who fathered her daughter, Kyoko. She and Cox were divorced in 1967, two years before she married Lennon.

"The Lennon half of the couple was born in October 1940. His father left home before John was born to become a seaman and his mother, incapable of caring for the boy, turned John over to his aunt and uncle when he was four and a half. They lived several blocks away from his mother in Liverpool, England. Lennon, who attended Liverpool private schools, met a kid named Paul McCartney in 1956 at the Woolton Parish Church Festival in Liverpool. The following year, the two formed their first band, the Nurk Twins. In 1958, John formed the Quarrymen, named after his high school. He asked Paul to join the band and agreed to audition a friend of Paul's, George Harrison. In 1959, the Quarrymen disbanded but later regrouped as Johnny and the Moon Dogs and then the Silver Beatles. They played in clubs, backing strippers, and they got their foot in the door of Liverpool's showcase Cavern Club. Pete Best was signed on as drummer and the Silver Beatles left England for Hamburg, where they played eight hours a night at the Indra Club. The Silver Beatles became the Beatles and, by 1960, when they returned to England, the band had become the talk of Liverpool. In 1962, John married Cynthia Powell and they had a son, Julian. John and Cynthia were divorced in 1968. Later in 1962, Richard Starkey—or Ringo Starr—replaced Best as the Beatles' drummer and the rest—as Lennon often says sarcastically—is pop history."

PLAYBOY: The word is out: John Lennon and Yoko Ono are back in the studio, recording again for the first time since 1975, when they vanished from public view. Let's start with you, John. What have you been doing?
LENNON: I've been baking bread and looking after the baby.
PLAYBOY: With what secret projects going on in the basement?
LENNON: That's like what everyone else who has asked me that question over the last few years says. "But what else have you been doing?" To which I say, "Are you kidding?" Because bread and babies, as every housewife knows, is a full-time job. After I made the loaves, I felt like I had conquered something. But as I watched the bread being eaten, I thought, Well, Jesus, don't I get a gold record or knighted or nothing?
PLAYBOY: Why did you become a house-husband?
LENNON: There were many reasons. I had been under obligation or contract from the time I was 22 until well into my 30s. After all those years, it was all I knew. I wasn't free. I was boxed in. My contract was the physical manifestation of being in prison. It was more important to face

myself and face that reality than to continue a life of rock 'n' roll—and to go up and down with the whims of either your own performance or the public's opinion of you. Rock 'n' roll was not fun anymore. I chose not to take the standard options in my business—going to Vegas and singing your great hits, if you're lucky, or going to hell, which is where Elvis went.

ONO: John was like an artist who is very good at drawing circles. He sticks to that and it becomes his label. He has a gallery to promote that. And the next year, he will do triangles or something. It doesn't reflect his life at all. When you continue doing the same thing for 10 years, you get a prize for having done it.

LENNON: You get the big prize when you get cancer and you have been drawing circles and triangles for 10 years. I had become a craftsman and I could have continued being a craftsman. I respect craftsmen, but I am not interested in becoming one.

ONO: Just to prove that you can go on dishing out things.

PLAYBOY: You're talking about records, of course.

LENNON: Yeah, to churn them out because I was expected to, like so many people who put out an album every six months because they're supposed to.

PLAYBOY: Would you be referring to Paul McCartney?

LENNON: Not only Paul. But I had lost the initial freedom of the artist by becoming enslaved to the image of what the artist is supposed to do. A lot of artists kill themselves because of it, whether it is through drink, like Dylan Thomas, or through insanity, like Van Gogh, or through V.D., like Gauguin.

PLAYBOY: Most people would have continued to churn out the product. How were you able to see a way out?

LENNON: Most people don't live with Yoko Ono.

PLAYBOY: Which means?

LENNON: Most people don't have a companion who will tell the truth and refuse to live with a bullshit artist, which I am pretty good at. I can bullshit myself and everybody around. Yoko: That's my answer.

PLAYBOY: What did she do for you?

LENNON: She showed me the possibility of the alternative. "You don't have to do this." "I don't? Really? But—but—but—but—but…." Of course, it wasn't that simple and it didn't sink in overnight. It took constant reinforcement. Walking away is much harder than carrying on. I've done both. On demand and on schedule, I had turned out records from 1962 to 1975. Walking away seemed like what the guys go through at 65, when suddenly they're supposed to not exist anymore and they're sent out of the office [knocks on the desk three times]: "Your life is over. Time for golf."

PLAYBOY: Yoko, how did you feel about John's becoming a househusband?

ONO: When John and I would go out, people would come up and say, "John, what are you doing?" but they never asked about me, because, as a woman, I wasn't supposed to be doing anything.

LENNON: When I was cleaning the cat shit and feeding Sean, she was sitting in rooms full of smoke with men in three-piece suits that they couldn't button.

ONO: I handled the business: old business—Apple, Maclen [the Beatles' record company and publishing company, respectively] and new investments.

LENNON: We had to face the business. It was either another case of asking some daddy to come solve our business or having one of us do it. Those lawyers were getting a quarter of a million dollars a year to sit around a table and eat salmon at the Plaza. Most of them didn't seem interested in solving the problems. Every lawyer had a lawyer. Each Beatle had four or five people working. So we felt we had to look after that side of the business and get rid of it and deal with it before we could start dealing with our own life. And the only one of us who has the talent or the ability to deal with it on that level is Yoko.

PLAYBOY: Did you have experience handling business matters of that proportion?

ONO: I learned. The law is not a mystery to me anymore. Politicians are not a mystery to me. I'm not scared of all that establishment anymore. At first, my own accountant and my own lawyer could not deal with the fact that I was telling them what to do.

LENNON: There was a bit of an attitude that this is John's wife, but surely she can't really be representing him.

ONO: A lawyer would send a letter to the directors, but instead of sending it to me, he would send it to John or send it to my lawyer. You'd be surprised how much insult I took from them initially. There was all this, "But you don't know anything about law; I can't talk to you." I said, "All right, talk to me in the way I can understand it. I am a director too."

LENNON: They can't stand it. But they have to stand it, because she is who represents us. [Chuckles] They're all male, you know, just big and fat, vodka lunch, shouting males, like trained dogs, trained to attack all the time. Recently, she made it possible for us to earn a large sum of money that benefited all of them and they fought and fought not to let her do it, because it was her idea and she was a woman and she was not a professional. But she did it, and then one of the guys said to her, "Well, Lennon does it again." But Lennon didn't have anything to do with it.

> "You know, I don't believe in yesterday…. Do we have to be crucified again because a whole pile of dummies missed it the first time?"

PLAYBOY: Why are you returning to the studio and public life?

LENNON: You breathe in and you breathe out. We feel like doing it and we have something to say. Also, Yoko and I attempted a few times to make music together, but that was a long time ago and people still had the idea that the Beatles were some kind of sacred thing that shouldn't step outside its circle. It was hard for us to work together then. We think either people have forgotten or they have grown up by now, so we can make a second foray into that place where she and I are together, making music—simply that. It's not like I'm some wondrous, mystic prince from the rock-'n'-roll world dabbling in strange music with this exotic, Oriental dragon lady, which was the picture projected by the press before.

PLAYBOY: Some people have accused you of playing to the media. First you become a recluse, then you talk selectively to the press because you have a new album coming out.

LENNON: That's ridiculous. People always said John and Yoko would do anything for the publicity. In the Newsweek article [September 29, 1980], it says the reporter asked us, "Why did you go underground?" Well, she never asked it that way and I didn't go underground. I just stopped talking to the press.

It got to be pretty funny. I was calling myself Greta Hughes or Howard Garbo through that period. But still the gossip items never stopped. We never stopped being in the press, but there seemed to be more written about us when we weren't talking to the press than when we were.

PLAYBOY: How do you feel about all the negative press that's been directed through the years at Yoko, your "dragon lady," as you put it?

LENNON: We are both sensitive people and we were hurt a lot by it. I mean, we couldn't understand it. When you're in love, when somebody says something like, "How can you be with that woman?" you say, "What do you mean? I am with this goddess of love, the fulfillment of my whole life. Why are you saying this? Why do you want to throw a rock at her

or punish me for being in love with her?" Our love helped us survive it, but some of it was pretty violent. There were a few times when we nearly went under, but we managed to survive and here we are. [*Looks upward*] Thank you, thank you, thank you.

PLAYBOY: But what about the charge that John Lennon is under Yoko's spell, under her control?

LENNON: Well, that's rubbish, you know. Nobody controls me. I'm uncontrollable. The only one who controls me is me, and that's just barely possible.

PLAYBOY: Still, many people believe it.

LENNON: Listen, if somebody's gonna impress me, whether it be a Maharishi or a Yoko Ono, there comes a point when the emperor has no clothes. There comes a point when I will see. So for all you folks out there who think that I'm having the wool pulled over my eyes, well, that's an insult to me. Not that you think less of Yoko, because that's your problem. What I think of her is what counts! Because—fuck you, brother and sister—you don't know what's happening. I'm not here for you. I'm here for me and her and the baby!

ONO: Of course, it's a total insult to me—

LENNON: Well, you're always insulted, my dear wife. It's natural—

ONO: Why should I bother to control anybody?

LENNON: She doesn't need me.

ONO: I have my own life, you know.

LENNON: She doesn't need a Beatle. Who needs a Beatle?

ONO: Do people think I'm that much of a con? John lasted two months with the Maharishi. Two months. I must be the biggest con in the world, because I've been with him 13 years.

LENNON: But people do say that.

PLAYBOY: That's our point. Why?

LENNON: They want to hold on to something they never had in the first place. Anybody who claims to have some interest in me as an individual artist or even as part of the Beatles has absolutely misunderstood everything I ever said if they can't see why I'm with Yoko. And if they can't see that, they don't see anything. They're just jacking off to—it could be anybody. Mick Jagger or somebody else. Let them go jack off to Mick Jagger, okay? I don't need it.

PLAYBOY: He'll appreciate that.

LENNON: I absolutely don't need it. Let them chase Wings. Just forget about me. If that's what you want, go after Paul or Mick. I ain't here for that. If that's not apparent in my past, I'm saying it in black and green, next to all the tits and asses on page 196. Go play with the other boys. Don't bother me. Go play with the Rolling Wings.

PLAYBOY: Do you—

LENNON: No, wait a minute. Let's stay with this a second; sometimes I can't let go of it. [He is on his feet, climbing up the refrigerator] Nobody ever said anything about Paul's having a spell on me or my having one on Paul! They never thought that was abnormal in those days, two guys together, or four guys together! Why didn't they ever say, "How come those guys don't split up? I mean, what's going on backstage? What is this Paul and John business? How can they be together so long?" We spent more time together in the early days than John and Yoko: the four of us sleeping in the same room, practically in the same bed, in the same truck, living together night and day, eating, shitting and pissing together! All right? Doing everything together! Nobody said a damn thing about being under a spell. Maybe they said we were under the spell of Brian Epstein or George Martin [the Beatles' first manager and producer, respectively]. There's always somebody who has to be doing something to you.

You know, they're congratulating the Stones on being together 112 years. Whoooopee! At least Charlie and Bill still got their families. In the '80s, they'll be asking, "Why are those guys still together? Can't they hack it on their own? Why do they have to be surrounded by a gang? Is the little leader scared somebody's gonna knife him in the back?" That's gonna be the question. That's-a-gonna be the question! They're gonna look back at the Beatles and the Stones and all those guys are relics. The days when those bands were just all men will be on the newsreels, you know. They will be showing pictures of the guy with lipstick wriggling his ass and the four guys with the evil black make-up on their eyes trying to look raunchy. That's gonna be the joke in the future, not a couple singing together or living and working together. It's all right when you're 16, 17, 18 to have male companions and idols, okay? It's tribal and it's gang and it's fine. But when it continues and you're still doing it when you're 40, that means you're still 16 in the head.

PLAYBOY: Let's start at the beginning. Tell us the story of how the wondrous mystic prince and the exotic dragon lady met.

LENNON: It was in 1966 in England. I'd been told about this "event"—this Japanese avant-garde artist coming from America.

I was looking around the gallery and I saw this ladder and climbed up and got a look in this spyglass on the top of the ladder—you feel like a fool—and it just said, yes. Now, at the time, all the avant-garde was smash the piano with a hammer and break the sculpture and anti-, anti-, anti-, anti-, anti. It was all boring negative crap, you know. And just that yes made me stay in a gallery full of apples and nails.

There was a sign that said, Hammer a nail in, so I said, "Can I hammer a nail in?" But Yoko said no, because the show wasn't opening until the next day. But the owner came up and whispered to her, "Let him hammer a nail in. You know, he's a millionaire. He might buy it." And so there was this little conference, and finally she said, "Okay, you can hammer a nail in for five shillings." So smartass says, "Well, I'll give you an imaginary five shillings and hammer an imaginary nail in." And that's when we really met. That's when we locked eyes and she got it and I got it and, as they say in all the interviews we do, the rest is history.

"The Beatles don't exist and can never exist again. We are not in our 20s. We cannot be that again, nor can the people who are listening."

PLAYBOY: What happened next?

LENNON: Of course, I was a Beatle, but things had begun to change. In 1966, just before we met, I went to Almería, Spain, to make the movie How I Won the War. It did me a lot of good to get away. I was there six weeks. I wrote "Strawberry Fields Forever" there, by the way. It gave me time to think on my own, away from the others. From then on, I was looking for somewhere to go, but I didn't have the nerve to really step out on the boat by myself and push it off. But when I fell in love with Yoko, I knew, My God, this is different from anything I've ever known. This is something other. This is more than a hit record, more than gold, more than everything. It is indescribable.

PLAYBOY: Were falling in love with Yoko and wanting to leave the Beatles connected?

LENNON: As I said, I had already begun to want to leave, but when I met Yoko is like when you meet your first woman. You leave the guys at the bar. You don't go play football anymore. You don't go play snooker or billiards. Maybe some guys do it on Friday night or something, but once I found the woman, the boys became of no interest whatsoever other than being old school friends. "Those wedding bells are breaking up that old gang of mine." We got married three years later, in 1969. That was the end of the boys. And it just so happened that the boys were well known and

weren't just local guys at the bar. Everybody got so upset over it. There was a lot of shit thrown at us. A lot of hateful stuff.

ONO: Even now, I just read that Paul said, "I understand that he wants to be with her, but why does he have to be with her all the time?"

LENNON: Yoko, do you still have to carry that cross? That was years ago.

ONO: No, no, no. He said it recently. I mean, what happened with John is like, I sort of went to bed with this guy that I liked and suddenly the next morning, I see these three in-laws, standing there.

LENNON: I've always thought there was this underlying thing in Paul's "Get Back." When we were in the studio recording it, every time he sang the line "Get back to where you once belonged," he'd look at Yoko.

PLAYBOY: Are you kidding?

LENNON: No. But maybe he'll say I'm paranoid.

[*The next portion of the interview took place with Lennon alone.*]

PLAYBOY: This may be the time to talk about those "in-laws," as Yoko put it. John, you've been asked this a thousand times, but why is it so unthinkable that the Beatles might get back together to make some music?

LENNON: Do you want to go back to high school? Why should I go back 10 years to provide an illusion for you that I know does not exist? It cannot exist.

PLAYBOY: Then forget the illusion. What about just to make some great music again? Do you acknowledge that the Beatles made great music?

LENNON: Why should the Beatles give more? Didn't they give everything on God's earth for 10 years? Didn't they give themselves? You're like the typical sort of love-hate fan who says, "Thank you for everything you did for us in the '60s—would you just give me another shot? Just one more miracle?"

PLAYBOY: We're not talking about miracles—just good music.

LENNON: When Rodgers worked with Hart and then worked with Hammerstein, do you think he should have stayed with one instead of working with the other? Should Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis have stayed together because I used to like them together? What is this game of doing things because other people want it? The whole Beatle idea was to do what you want, right? To take your own responsibility.

"Men never developed the inner wisdom; they didn't have time. So most men do rely on women's inner wisdom, whether they express that or not."

PLAYBOY: All right, but get back to the music itself: You don't agree that the Beatles created the best rock 'n' roll that's been produced?

LENNON: I don't. The Beatles, you see—I'm too involved in them artistically. I cannot see them objectively. I cannot listen to them objectively. I'm dissatisfied with every record the Beatles ever fucking made. There ain't one of them I wouldn't remake—including all the Beatles records and all my individual ones. So I cannot possibly give you an assessment of what the Beatles are.

When I was a Beatle, I thought we were the best fucking group in the goddamned world. And believing that is what made us what were were—whether we call it the best rock-'n'-roll group or the best pop group or whatever. But you play me those tracks today and I want to remake every damn one of them. There's not a single one…. I heard "Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds" on the radio last night. It's abysmal, you know. The track is just terrible. I mean, it's great, but it wasn't made right, know what I mean? But that's the artistic trip, isn't it? That's why you keep going. But to get back to your original question about the Beatles and their music, the answer is that we did some good stuff and we did some bad stuff.

PLAYBOY: Many people feel that none of the songs Paul has done alone match the songs he did as a Beatle. Do you honestly feel that any of your songs—on the Plastic Ono Band records—will have the lasting imprint of "Eleanor Rigby" or "Strawberry Fields"?

LENNON: "Imagine," "Love" and those Plastic Ono Band songs stand up to any song that was written when I was a Beatle. Now, it may take you 20 or 30 years to appreciate that, but the fact is, if you check those songs out, you will see that it is as good as any fucking stuff that was ever done.

PLAYBOY: It seems as if you're trying to say to the world, "We were just a good band making some good music," while a lot of the rest of the world is saying, "It wasn't just some good music, it was the best."

LENNON: Well, if it was the best, so what?

PLAYBOY: So—

LENNON: It can never be again! Everyone always talks about a good thing coming to an end, as if life was over. But I'll be 40 when this interview comes out. Paul is 38. Elton John, Bob Dylan—we're all relatively young people. The game isn't over yet. Everyone talks in terms of the last record or the last Beatle concert—but, God willing, there are another 40 years of productivity to go. I'm not judging whether "I Am the Walrus" is better or worse than "Imagine." It is for others to judge. I am doing it. I do. I don't stand back and judge—I do.

PLAYBOY: You keep saying you don't want to go back 10 years, that too much has changed. Don't you ever feel it would be interesting—never mind cosmic, just interesting—to get together, with all your new experiences, and cross your talents?

LENNON: Wouldn't it be interesting to take Elvis back to his Sun Records period? I don't know. But I'm content to listen to his Sun Records. I don't want to dig him up out of the grave. The Beatles don't exist and can never exist again. John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Richard Starkey could put on a concert—but it can never be the Beatles singing "Strawberry Fields" or "I Am the Walrus" again, because we are not in our 20s. We cannot be that again, nor can the people who are listening.

PLAYBOY: But aren't you the one who is making it too important? What if it were just nostalgic fun? A high school reunion?

LENNON: I never went to high school reunions. My thing is, Out of sight, out of mind. That's my attitude toward life. So I don't have any romanticism about any part of my past. I think of it only inasmuch as it gave me pleasure or helped me grow psychologically. That is the only thing that interests me about yesterday. I don't believe in yesterday, by the way. You know I don't believe in yesterday. I am only interested in what I am doing now.

PLAYBOY: What about the people of your generation, the ones who feel a certain kind of music—and spirit—died when the Beatles broke up?

LENNON: If they didn't understand the Beatles and the '60s then, what the fuck could we do for them now? Do we have to divide the fish and the loaves for the multitudes again? Do we have to get crucified again? Do we have to do the walking on water again because a whole pile of dummies didn't see it the first time, or didn't believe it when they saw it? You know, that's what they're asking: "Get off the cross. I didn't understand the first bit yet. Can you do that again?" No way. You can never go home. It doesn't exist.

PLAYBOY: Do you find that the clamor for a Beatles reunion has died down?

LENNON: Well, I heard some Beatles stuff on the radio the other day and I heard "Green Onion"—no, "Glass Onion." I don't even know my

own songs! I listened to it because it was a rare track—

PLAYBOY: That was the one that contributed to the "Paul McCartney is dead" uproar because of the lyric "The walrus is Paul."

LENNON: Yeah. That line was a joke, you know. That line was put in partly because I was feeling guilty because I was with Yoko, and I knew I was finally high and dry. In a perverse way, I was sort of saying to Paul, "Here, have this crumb, have this illusion, have this stroke—because I'm leaving you." Anyway, it's a song they don't usually play. When a radio station has a Beatles weekend, they usually play the same 10 songs—"A Hard Day's Night," "Help!," "Yesterday," "Something," "Let It Be"—you know, there's all that wealth of material, but we hear only 10 songs. So the deejay says, "I want to thank John, Paul, George and Ringo for not getting back together and spoiling a good thing." I thought it was a good sign. Maybe people are catching on.

PLAYBOY: Aside from the millions you've been offered for a reunion concert, how did you feel about producer Lorne Michaels's generous offer of R55,700.00 for appearing together on Saturday Night Live a few years ago?

LENNON: Oh, yeah. Paul and I were together watching that show. He was visiting us at our place in the Dakota. We were watching it and almost went down to the studio, just as a gag. We nearly got into a cab, but we were actually too tired.

PLAYBOY: How did you and Paul happen to be watching TV together?

LENNON: That was a period when Paul just kept turning up at our door with a guitar. I would let him in, but finally I said to him, "Please call before you come over. It's not 1956 and turning up at the door isn't the same anymore. You know, just give me a ring." He was upset by that, but I didn't mean it badly. I just meant that I was taking care of a baby all day and some guy turns up at the door…. But, anyway, back on that night, he and Linda walked in and he and I were just sitting there, watching the show, and we went, "Ha-ha, wouldn't it be funny if we went down?" but we didn't.

PLAYBOY: Was that the last time you saw Paul?

LENNON: Yes, but I didn't mean it like that.

"People around John saw me as a terrible threat. I mean, I heard there were plans to kill me. Not the Beatles, but the people around them."

PLAYBOY: We're asking because there's always a lot of speculation about whether the Fab Four are dreaded enemies or the best of friends.

LENNON: We're neither. I haven't seen any of the Beatles for I don't know how much time. Somebody asked me what I thought of Paul's last album and I made some remark like, I thought he was depressed and sad. But then I realized I hadn't listened to the whole damn thing. I heard one track—the hit "Coming Up," which I thought was a good piece of work. Then I heard something else that sounded like he was depressed. But I don't follow their work. I don't follow Wings, you know. I don't give a shit what Wings is doing, or what George's new album is doing, or what Ringo is doing. I'm not interested, no more than I am in what Elton John or Bob Dylan is doing. It's not callousness, it's just that I'm too busy living my own life to be following what other people are doing, whether they're the Beatles or guys I went to college with or people I had intense relationships with before I met the Beatles.

PLAYBOY: Besides "Coming Up," what do you think of Paul's work since he left the Beatles?

LENNON: I kind of admire the way Paul started back from scratch, forming a new band and playing in small dance halls, because that's what he wanted to do with the Beatles—he wanted us to go back to the dance halls and experience that again. But I didn't. That was one of the problems, in a way, that he wanted to relive it all or something—I don't know what it was. But I kind of admire the way he got off his pedestal—now he's back on it again, but I mean, he did what he wanted to do. That's fine, but it's just not what I wanted to do.

PLAYBOY: What about the music?

LENNON: "The Long and Winding Road" was the last gasp from him. Although I really haven't listened.

PLAYBOY: You say you haven't listened to Paul's work and haven't really talked to him since that night in your apartment—

LENNON: Really talked to him, no, that's the operative word. I haven't really talked to him in 10 years. Because I haven't spent time with him. I've been doing other things and so has he. You know, he's got 25 kids and about 20 million records out—how can he spend time talking? He's always working.

PLAYBOY: Then let's talk about the work you did together. Generally speaking, what did each of you contribute to the Lennon-McCartney songwriting team?

LENNON: Well, you could say that he provided a lightness, an optimism, while I would always go for the sadness, the discords, a certain bluesy edge. There was a period when I thought I didn't write melodies, that Paul wrote those and I just wrote straight, shouting rock 'n' roll. But, of course, when I think of some of my own songs—"In My Life"—or some of the early stuff—"This Boy"—I was writing melody with the best of them. Paul had a lot of training, could play a lot of instruments. He'd say, "Well, why don't you change that there? You've done that note 50 times in the song." You know, I'll grab a note and ram it home. Then again, I'd be the one to figure out where to go with a song—a story that Paul would start. In a lot of the songs, my stuff is the "middle eight," the bridge.

PLAYBOY: For example?

LENNON: Take "Michelle." Paul and I were staying somewhere, and he walked in and hummed the first few bars, with the words, you know [*sings verse of "Michelle"*], and he says, "Where do I go from here?" I'd been listening to blues singer Nina Simone, who did something like "I love you!" in one of her songs and that made me think of the middle eight for "Michelle" [*sings]*: "I love you, I love you, I l-o-ove you…."

PLAYBOY: What was the difference in terms of lyrics?

LENNON: I always had an easier time with lyrics, though Paul is quite a capable lyricist who doesn't think he is. So he doesn't go for it. Rather than face the problem, he would avoid it. "Hey Jude" is a damn good set of lyrics. I made no contribution to the lyrics there. And a couple of lines he has come up with show indications of a good lyricist. But he just hasn't taken it anywhere. Still, in the early days, we didn't care about lyrics as long as the song had some vague theme—she loves you, he loves him, they all love each other. It was the hook, line and sound we were going for. That's still my attitude, but I can't leave lyrics alone. I have to make them make sense apart from the songs.

PLAYBOY: What's an example of a lyric you and Paul worked on together?

LENNON: In "We Can Work It Out," Paul did the first half, I did the middle eight. But you've got Paul writing, "We can work it out / We can work it out"—real optimistic, y' know, and me, impatient: "Life is very short and there's no time / For fussing and fighting, my friend…."

PLAYBOY: Paul tells the story and John philosophizes.

LENNON: Sure. Well, I was always like that, you know. I was like that

before the Beatles and after the Beatles. I always asked why people did things and why society was like it was. I didn't just accept it for what it was apparently doing. I always looked below the surface.

PLAYBOY: When you talk about working together on a single lyric like "We Can Work It Out," it suggests that you and Paul worked a lot more closely than you've admitted in the past. Haven't you said that you wrote most of your songs separately, despite putting both of your names on them?

LENNON: Yeah, I was lying. [Laughs] It was when I felt resentful, so I felt that we did everything apart. But, actually, a lot of the songs we did eyeball to eyeball.

PLAYBOY: But many of them were done apart, weren't they?

LENNON: Yeah. Sgt. Pepper was Paul's idea, and I remember he worked on it a lot and suddenly called me to go into the studio, said it was time to write some songs. On Pepper, under the pressure of only 10 days, I managed to come up with "Lucy in the Sky" and "A Day in the Life." We weren't communicating enough, you see. And later on, that's why I got resentful about all that stuff. But now I understand that it was just the same competitive game going on.

PLAYBOY: But the competitive game was good for you, wasn't it?

LENNON: In the early days. We'd make a record in 12 hours or something; they would want a single every three months and we'd have to write it in a hotel room or in a van. So the cooperation was functional as well as musical.

PLAYBOY: Don't you think that cooperation, that magic between you, is something you've missed in your work since?

LENNON: I never actually felt a loss. I don't want it to sound negative, like I didn't need Paul, because when he was there, obviously, it worked. But I can't—it's easier to say what I gave to him than what he gave to me. And he'd say the same.

PLAYBOY: Just a quick aside, but while we're on the subject of lyrics and your resentment of Paul, what made you write "How Do You Sleep?," which contains lyrics such as, "Those freaks was right when they said you was dead" and "The only thing you done was yesterday / And since you've gone, you're just another day"?

LENNON: [*Smiles*] You know, I wasn't really feeling that vicious at the time. But I was using my resentment toward Paul to create a song, let's put it that way. He saw that it pointedly refers to him, and people kept hounding him about it. But, you know, there were a few digs on his album before mine. He's so obscure other people didn't notice them, but I heard them. I thought, Well, I'm not obscure, I just get right down to the nitty-gritty. So he'd done it his way and I did it mine. But as to the line you quoted, yeah, I think Paul died creatively, in a way.

PLAYBOY: That's what we were getting at: You say that what you've done since the Beatles stands up well, but isn't it possible that with all of you, it's been a case of the creative whole being greater than the parts?

LENNON: I don't know whether this will gel for you: When the Beatles played in America for the first time, they played pure craftsmanship. Meaning they were already old hands. The jism had gone out of the performances a long time ago. In the same respect, the songwriting creativity had left Paul and me in the mid-'60s. When we wrote together in the early days, it was like the beginning of a relationship. Lots of energy. In the Sgt. Pepper—Abbey Road period, the relationship had matured. Maybe had we gone on together, more interesting things would have come, but it couldn't have been the same.

PLAYBOY: Let's move on to Ringo. What's your opinion of him musically?

LENNON: Ringo was a star in his own right in Liverpool before we even met. He was a professional drummer who sang and performed and had Ringo Starr-time and he was in one of the top groups in Britain but especially in Liverpool before we even had a drummer. So Ringo's talent would have come out one way or the other as something or other. I don't know what he would have ended up as, but whatever that spark is in Ringo that we all know but can't put our finger on—whether it is acting, drumming or singing I don't know—there is something in him that is projectable and he would have surfaced with or without the Beatles. Ringo is a damn good drummer. He is not technically good, but I think Ringo's drumming is underrated the same way Paul's bass playing is underrated. Paul was one of the most innovative bass players ever. And half the stuff that is going on now is directly ripped off from his Beatles period. He is an egomaniac about everything else about himself, but his bass playing he was always a bit coy about. I think Paul and Ringo stand up with any of the rock musicians. Not technically great—none of us are technical musicians. None of us could read music. None of us can write it. But as pure musicians, as inspired humans to make the noise, they are as good as anybody.

PLAYBOY: How about George's solo music?

LENNON: I think All Things Must Pass was all right. It just went on too long.

> "I say to John, 'I carried the baby nine months and that's enough, so you take care of it afterward.' I believe children belong to the society."

PLAYBOY: How did you feel about the lawsuit George lost that claimed the music to "My Sweet Lord" is a rip-off of the Shirelles' hit "He's So Fine"?

LENNON: Well, he walked right into it. He knew what he was doing.

PLAYBOY: Are you saying he consciously plagiarized the song?

LENNON: He must have known, you know. He's smarter than that. It's irrelevant, actually—only on a monetary level does it matter. He could have changed a couple of bars in that song and nobody could ever have touched him, but he just let it go and paid the price. Maybe he thought God would just sort of let him off. [*At press time, the court has found Harrison guilty of "subconscious" plagiarism but has not yet ruled on damages.*]

PLAYBOY: You actually haven't mentioned George much in this interview.

LENNON: Well, I was hurt by George's book, I, Me, Mine—so this message will go to him. He put a book out privately on his life that, by glaring omission, says that my influence on his life is absolutely zilch and nil. In his book, which is purportedly this clarity of vision of his influence on each song he wrote, he remembers every two-bit sax player or guitarist he met in subsequent years. I'm not in the book.

PLAYBOY: Why?

LENNON: Because George's relationship with me was one of young follower and older guy. He's three or four years younger than me. It's a love-hate relationship and I think George still bears resentment toward me for being a daddy who left home. He would not agree with this, but that's my feeling about it. I was just hurt. I was just left out, as if I didn't exist. I don't want to be that egomaniacal, but he was like a disciple of mine when we started. I was already an art student when Paul and George were still in grammar school [*equivalent to high school in the U.S.*]. There is a vast difference between being in high school and being in college and I was already in college and already had sexual relationships, already drank and did a lot of things like that. When George was a kid, he used to follow me and my first girlfriend, Cynthia—who became my wife—around. We'd come out of art school and he'd be hovering around like those kids at the gate of the Dakota now.

I remember the day he called to ask for help on "Taxman," one of his bigger songs. I threw in a few one-liners to help the song along, because that's what he asked for. He came to me because he couldn't go to Paul, because Paul wouldn't have helped him at that period. I didn't want to do it. I thought, Oh, no, don't tell me I have to work on George's stuff. It's enough doing my own and Paul's. But because I loved him and I didn't want to hurt him when he called me that afternoon and said, "Will you help me with this song?" I just sort of bit my tongue and said okay. It had been John and Paul so long, he'd been left out because he hadn't been a songwriter up until then. As a singer, we allowed him only one track on each album. If you listen to the Beatles' first albums, the English versions, he gets a single track. The songs he and Ringo sang at first were the songs that used to be part of my repertoire in the dance halls. I used to pick songs for them from my repertoire—the easier ones to sing. So I am slightly resentful of George's book. But don't get me wrong. I still love those guys. The Beatles are over, but John, Paul, George and Ringo go on.

PLAYBOY: Didn't all four Beatles work on a song you wrote for Ringo in 1973?

LENNON: "I'm the Greatest." It was the Muhammad Ali line, of course. It was perfect for Ringo to sing. If I said, "I'm the greatest," they'd all take it so seriously. No one would get upset with Ringo singing it.

PLAYBOY: Did you enjoy playing with George and Ringo again?

LENNON: Yeah, except when George and Billy Preston started saying, "Let's form a group. Let's form a group." I was embarrassed when George kept asking me. He was just enjoying the session and the spirit was very good, but I was with Yoko, you know. We took time out from what we were doing. The very fact that they would imagine I would form a male group without Yoko! It was still in their minds….

PLAYBOY: Just to finish your favorite subject, what about the suggestion that the four of you put aside your personal feelings and regroup to give a mammoth concert for charity, some sort of giant benefit?

LENNON: I don't want to have anything to do with benefits. I have been benefited to death.

PLAYBOY: Why?

LENNON: Because they're always rip-offs. I haven't performed for personal gain since 1966, when the Beatles last performed. Every concert since then, Yoko and I did for specific charities, except for a Toronto thing that was a rock-'n'-roll revival. Every one of them was a mess or a rip-off. So now we give money to who we want. You've heard of tithing?

PLAYBOY: That's when you give away a fixed percentage of your income.

LENNON: Right. I am just going to do it privately. I am not going to get locked into that business of saving the world onstage. The show is always a mess and the artist always comes off badly.

PLAYBOY: What about the Bangladesh concert, in which George and other people such as Dylan performed?

LENNON: Bangladesh was caca.

PLAYBOY: You mean because of all the questions that were raised about where the money went?

LENNON: Yeah, right. I can't even talk about it, because it's still a problem. You'll have to check with Mother [Yoko], because she knows the ins and outs of it. I don't. But it's all a rip-off. So forget about it. All of you who are reading this, don't bother sending me all that garbage about, "Just come and save the Indians, come and save the blacks, come and save the war veterans." Anybody I want to save will be helped through our tithing, which is 10 percent of whatever we earn.

PLAYBOY: But that doesn't compare with what one promoter, Sid Bernstein, said you could raise by giving a world-wide televised concert—playing separately, as individuals or together as the Beatles. He estimated you could raise over R3,500.00 million in one day.

LENNON: That was a commercial for Sid Bernstein written with Jewish schmaltz and showbiz and tears, dropping on one knee. It was Al Jolson. Okay. So I don't buy that. Okay.

PLAYBOY: But the fact is, R3,500.00 million to a poverty-stricken country in South America—

LENNON: Where do people get off saying the Beatles should give R3,500.00 million to South America? You know, America has poured billions into places like that. It doesn't mean a damn thing. After they've eaten that meal, then what? It lasts for only a day. After the R3,500.00 million is gone, then what? It goes round and round in circles. You can pour money in forever. After Peru, then Harlem, then Britain. There is no one concert. We would have to dedicate the rest of our lives to one world concert tour, and I'm not ready for it. Not in this lifetime, anyway.

[*Ono rejoins the conversation.*]

PLAYBOY: On the subject of your own wealth, the New York Post recently said you admitted to being worth over R2,650.00 million and—

LENNON: We never admitted anything.

PLAYBOY: The Post said you had.

LENNON: What the Post says—okay, so we are rich. So what?

PLAYBOY: The question is, How does that jibe with your political philosophies? You're supposed to be socialists, aren't you?

LENNON: In England, there are only two things to be, basically: You are either for the labor movement or for the capitalist movement. Either you become a right-wing Archie Bunker if you are in the class I am in, or you become an instinctive socialist, which I was. That meant I think people should get their false teeth and their health looked after, all the rest of it. But apart from that, I worked for money and I wanted to be rich. So what the hell—if that's a paradox, then I'm a socialist. But I am not anything. What I used to be is guilty about money. That's why I lost it, either by giving it away or by allowing myself to be screwed by so-called managers.

"This Beatles talk bores me to death."

PLAYBOY: Whatever your politics, you've played the capitalist game very well, parlaying your Beatles royalties into real estate, livestock—

ONO: There is no denying that we are still living in the capitalist world. I think that in order to survive and to change the world, you have to take care of yourself first. You have to survive yourself. I used to say to myself, I am the only socialist living here. [Laughs] I don't have a penny. It is all John's, so I'm clean. But I was using his money and I had to face that hypocrisy. I used to think that money was obscene, that the artists didn't have to think about money. But to change society, there are two ways to go: through violence or the power of money within the system. A lot of people in the '60s went underground and were involved in bombings and other violence. But that is not the way, definitely not for me. So to change the system—even if you are going to become a mayor or something—you need money.

PLAYBOY: To what extent do you play the game without getting caught up in it—money for the sake of money, in other words?

ONO: There is a limit. It would probably be parallel to our level of security. Do you know what I mean? I mean the emotional-security level as well.

PLAYBOY: Has it reached that level yet?

ONO: No, not yet. I don't know. It might have.

PLAYBOY: You mean with R2,650.00 million? Is that an accurate estimate?

ONO: I don't know what we have. It becomes so complex that you need to have 10 accountants working for two years to find out what you have. But let's say that we feel more comfortable now.

PLAYBOY: How have you chosen to invest your money?

ONO: To make money, you have to spend money. But if you are going to make money, you have to make it with love. I love Egyptian art. I make sure to get all the Egyptian things, not for their value but for their magic power. Each piece has a certain magic power. Also with houses. I just buy

ones we love, not the ones that people say are good investments.
PLAYBOY: The papers have made it sound like you are buying up the Atlantic Seaboard.
ONO: If you saw the houses, you would understand. They have become a good investment, but they are not an investment unless you sell them. We don't intend to sell. Each house is like a historic landmark and they're very beautiful.
PLAYBOY: Do you actually use all the properties?
ONO: Most people have the park to go to and run in—the park is a huge place—but John and I were never able to go to the park together. So we have to create our own parks, you know.
PLAYBOY: We heard that you own R1,050.00 million worth of dairy cows. Can that be true?
ONO: I don't know. I'm not a calculator. I'm not going by figures. I'm going by excellence of things.
LENNON: Sean and I were away for a weekend and Yoko came over to sell this cow and I was joking about it. We hadn't seen her for days; she spent all her time on it. But then I read the paper that said she sold it for a quarter of a million dollars. Only Yoko could sell a cow for that much. [*Laughter*]
PLAYBOY: For an artist, your business sense seems remarkable.
ONO: I was doing it just as a chess game. I love chess. I do everything like it's a chess game. Not on a Monopoly level—that's a bit more realistic. Chess is more conceptual.
PLAYBOY: John, do you really need all those houses around the country?
LENNON: They're good business.
PLAYBOY: Why does anyone need R2,650.00 million? Couldn't you be perfectly content with R1,750.00 million? Or R18.00 million?
LENNON: What would you suggest I do? Give everything away and walk the streets? The Buddhist says, "Get rid of the possessions of the mind." Walking away from all the money would not accomplish that. It's like the Beatles. I couldn't walk away from the Beatles. That's one possession that's still tagging along, right? If I walk away from one house or 400 houses, I'm not gonna escape it.
PLAYBOY: How do you escape it?
LENNON: It takes time to get rid of all this garbage that I've been carrying around that was influencing the way I thought and the way I lived. It had a lot to do with Yoko, showing me that I was still possessed. I left physically when I fell in love with Yoko, but mentally it took the last 10 years of struggling. I learned everything from her.
PLAYBOY: You make it sound like a teacher-pupil relationship.
LENNON: It is a teacher-pupil relationship. That's what people don't understand. She's the teacher and I'm the pupil. I'm the famous one, the one who's supposed to know everything, but she's my teacher. She's taught me everything I fucking know. She was there when I was nowhere, when I was the nowhere man. She's my Don Juan [a reference to Carlos Castaneda's Yaqui Indian teacher]. That's what people don't understand. I'm married to fucking Don Juan, that's the hardship of it. Don Juan doesn't have to laugh; Don Juan doesn't have to be charming; Don Juan just is. And what goes on around Don Juan is irrelevant to Don Juan.
PLAYBOY: Yoko, how do you feel about being John's teacher?
ONO: Well, he had a lot of experience before he met me, the kind of experience I never had. so I learned a lot from him, too. It's both ways. Maybe it's that I have strength, a feminine strength. Because women develop it—in a relationship, I think women really have the inner wisdom and they're carrying that while men have sort of the wisdom to cope with society, since they created it. Men never developed the inner wisdom; they didn't have time. So most men do rely on women's inner wisdom, whether they express that or not.
PLAYBOY: Is Yoko John's guru?
LENNON: No, a Don Juan doesn't have a following. A Don Juan isn't in the newspaper and doesn't have disciples and doesn't proselytize.
PLAYBOY: How has she taught you?
LENNON: When Don Juan said—when Don Ono said, "Get out! Because you're not getting it," well, it was like being sent into the desert. And the reason she wouldn't let me back in was because I wasn't ready to come back in. I had to settle things within myself. When I was ready to come back in, she let me back in. And that's what I'm living with.
PLAYBOY: You're talking about your separation.
LENNON: Yes. We were separated in the early '70s. She kicked me out. Suddenly, I was on a raft alone in the middle of the universe.
PLAYBOY: What happened?
LENNON: Well, at first, I thought, Whoopee, whoopee! You know, bachelor life! Whoopee! And then I woke up one day and I thought. What is this? I want to go home! But she wouldn't let me come home. That's why it was 18 months apart instead of six months. We were talking all the time on the phone and I would say, "I don't like this, I'm getting in trouble and I'd like to come home, please." And she would say, "You're not ready to come home." So what do you say? Okay, back to the bottle.
PLAYBOY: What did she mean, you weren't ready?
LENNON: She has her ways. Whether they be mystical or practical. When she said it's not ready, it ain't ready.
PLAYBOY: Back to the bottle?
LENNON: I was just trying to hide what I felt in the bottle. I was just insane. It was the lost weekend that lasted 18 months. I've never drunk so much in my life. I tried to drown myself in the bottle and I was with the heaviest drinkers in the business.
PLAYBOY: Such as?
LENNON: Such as Harry Nilsson, Bobby Keyes, Keith Moon. We couldn't pull ourselves out. We were trying to kill ourselves. I think Harry might still be trying, poor bugger—God bless you, Harry, wherever you are—but, Jesus, you know, I had to get away from that, because somebody was going to die. Well, Keith did. It was like, who's going to die first? Unfortunately, Keith was the one
PLAYBOY: Why the self-destruction?
LENNON: For me, it was because of being apart. I couldn't stand it. They had their own reasons, and it was. Let's all drown ourselves together. From where I was sitting, it looked like that. Let's kill ourselves but do it like Errol Flynn, you know, the macho, male way. It's embarrassing for me to think about that period, because I made a big fool of myself—but maybe it was a good lesson for me.

I wrote "Nobody Loves You When You're Down and Out" during that time. That's how I felt. It exactly expresses the whole period. For some reason, I always imagined Sinatra singing that one. I don't know why. It's kind of a Sinatra-esque song, really. He would do a perfect job with it. Are you listening, Frank? You need a song that isn't a piece of nothing. Here's the one for you, the horn arrangement and everything's made for you. But don't ask me to produce it.
PLAYBOY: That must have been the time the papers came out with reports about Lennon running around town with a Tampax on his head.
LENNON: The stories were all so exaggerated, but…. We were all in a restaurant, drinking, not eating, as usual at those gatherings, and I happened to go take a pee and there was a brand-new fresh Kotex, not Tampax, on the toilet. You know the old trick where you put a penny on your forehead and it sticks? I was a little high and I just picked it up and slapped it on and it stayed, you see. I walked out of the bathroom and I had a Kotex on my head. Big deal. Everybody went "Ha-ha-ha" and it fell off, but the press blew it up.
PLAYBOY: Why did you kick John out, Yoko?
ONO: There were many things. I'm what I call a "moving on" kind of girl; there's a song on our new album about it. Rather than deal with problems in relationships, I've always moved on. That's why I'm one of the very few survivors as a woman, you know. Women tend to be more into men usually, but I wasn't….
__ LENNON:__ Yoko looks upon men as assistants—of varying degrees of intimacy, but basically assistants. And this one's going to take a pee. [*He exits*]

ONO: I have no comment on that. But when I met John, women to him were basically people around who were serving him. He had to open himself up and face me—and I had to see what he was going through. But I thought I had to move on again, because I was suffering being with John.
PLAYBOY: Why?
ONO: The pressure from the public, being the one who broke up the Beatles and who made it impossible for them to get back together. My artwork suffered too. I thought I wanted to be free from being Mrs. Lennon, so I thought it would be a good idea for him to go to L.A. and leave me alone for a while. I had put up with it for many years. Even early on. when John was a Beatle, we stayed in a room and John and I were in bed and the door was closed and all that, but we didn't lock the door and one of the Beatle assistants just walked in and talked to him as if I weren't there. It was mind-blowing. I was invisible. The people around John saw me as a terrible threat. I mean, I heard there were plans to kill me. Not the Beatles but the people around them.
PLAYBOY: How did that news affect you?
ONO: The society doesn't understand that the woman can be castrated too. I felt castrated. Before, I was doing all right, thank you. My work might not have been selling much, I might have been poorer, but I had my pride. But the most humiliating thing is to be looked at as a parasite.
[*Lennon rejoins the conversation.*]
LENNON: When Yoko and I started doing stuff together, we would hold press conferences and announce our whatevers—we're going to wear bags or whatever. And before this one press conference, one Beatle assistant in the upper echelon of Beatle assistants leaned over to Yoko and said, "You know, you don't have to work. You've got enough money, now that you're Mrs. Lennon." And when she complained to me about it, I couldn't understand what she was talking about. "But this guy," I'd say. "He's just good old Charley, or whatever. He's been with us 20 years…." The same kind of thing happened in the studio. She would say to an engineer, "I'd like a little more treble, a little more bass," or "There's too much of whatever you're putting on," and they'd look at me and say, "What did you say, John?" Those days I didn't even notice it myself. Now I know what she's talking about. In Japan, when I ask for a cup of tea in Japanese, they look at Yoko and ask, "He wants a cup of tea?" in Japanese.
ONO: So a good few years of that kind of thing emasculates you. I had always been more macho than most guys I was with, in a sense. I had always been the breadwinner, because I always wanted to have the freedom and the control. Suddenly, I'm with somebody I can't possibly compete with on a level of earnings. Finally, I couldn't take it—or I decided not to take it any longer. I would have had the same difficulty even if I hadn't gotten involved with, ah—
LENNON: John. John is the name.
ONO: With John. But John wasn't just John. He was also his group and the people around them. When I say John, it's not just John—
LENNON: That's John. J-O-H-N. From Johan, I believe.
PLAYBOY: So you made him leave?
ONO: Yes.
LENNON: She don't suffer fools gladly, even if she's married to him.
PLAYBOY: How did you finally get back together?
ONO: It slowly started to dawn on me that John was not the trouble at all. John was a fine person. It was society that had become too much. We laugh about it now, but we started dating again. I wanted to be sure. I'm thankful to John's intelligence—
LENNON: Now, get that, editors—you got that word?
ONO: That he was intelligent enough to know this was the only way that we could save our marriage, not because we didn't love each other but because it was getting too much for me. Nothing would have changed if I had come back as Mrs. Lennon again.
PLAYBOY: What did change?
ONO: It was good for me to do the business and regain my pride about what I could do. And it was good to know what he needed, the role reversal that was so good for him.
LENNON: And we learned that it's better for the family if we are both working for the family, she doing the business and me playing mother and wife. We reordered our priorities. The number-one priority is her and the family. Everything else revolves around that.
ONO: It's a hard realization. These days, the society prefers single people. The encouragements are to divorce or separate or be single or gay—whatever. Corporations want singles—they work harder if they don't have family ties. They don't have to worry about being home in the evenings or on the weekends. There's not much room for emotions about family or personal relationships. You know, the whole thing they say to women approaching 30 that if you don't have a baby in the next few years, you're going to be in trouble, you'll never be a mother, so you'll never be fulfilled in that way and—
LENNON: Only Yoko was 73 when she had Sean. [*Laughter*]
There was something wrong with me, I thought, because I seemed to see things other people didn't see. I thought I was crazy or an egomaniac for claiming to see things other people didn't see.
ONO: So instead of the society discouraging children, since they are important for society, it should encourage them. It's the responsibility of everybody. But it is hard. A woman has to deny what she has, her womb, if she wants to make it. It seems that only the privileged classes can have families. Nowadays, maybe it's only the McCartneys and the Lennons or something.
LENNON: Everybody else becomes a worker-consumer.
ONO: And then Big Brother will decide—I hate to use the term Big Brother….
LENNON: Too late. They've got it on tape. [Laughs]
ONO: But, finally, the society—
LENNON: Big Sister—wait till she comes!
ONO: The society will do away with the roles of men and women. Babies will be born in test tubes and incubators….
LENNON: Then it's Aldous Huxley.
ONO: But we don't have to go that way. We don't have to deny any of our organs, you know.
LENNON: Some of my best friends are organs—
ONO: The new album—
LENNON: Back to the album, very good.
ONO: The album fights these things. The messages are sort of old-fashioned—family, relationships, children.
PLAYBOY: The album obviously reflects your new priorities. How have things gone for you since you made that decision?
LENNON: We got back together, decided this was our life, that having a baby was important to us and that anything else was subsidiary to that. We worked hard for that child. We went through all hell trying to have a baby, through many miscarriages and other problems. He is what they call a love child in truth. Doctors told us we could never have a child. We almost gave up. "Well, that's it, then, we can't have one…." We were told something was wrong with my sperm, that I abused myself so much in my youth that there was no chance. Yoko was 43, and so they said, no way. She has had too many miscarriages and when she was a young girl, there were no pills, so there were lots of abortions and miscarriages; her stomach must be like Kew Gardens in London. No way. But this Chinese acupuncturist in San Francisco said, "You behave yourself. No drugs, eat well, no drink. You have child in 18 months." And we said, "But the English doctors said…." He said. "Forget what they said. You have child." We had Sean and sent the acupuncturist a Polaroid of him just before he died, God rest his soul.
PLAYBOY: Were there any problems because of Yoko's age?
LENNON: Not because of her age but because of a screw-up in the hospital and the fucking price of fame. Somebody had made a transfusion of the wrong blood type into Yoko. I was there when it happened, and she starts to go rigid, and then shake, from the pain and the trauma. I run up to this nurse and say, "Go get the doctor!" I'm holding on tight to Yoko while this guy gets to the hospital room. He walks in, hardly notices that

Yoko is going through fucking convulsions, goes straight for me, smiles, shakes my hand and says, "I've always wanted to meet you, Mr. Lennon, I always enjoyed your music." I start screaming: "My wife's dying and you wanna talk about my music!" Christ!

PLAYBOY: Now that Sean is almost five, is he conscious of the fact that his father was a Beatle or have you protected him from your fame?

LENNON: I haven't said anything. Beatles were never mentioned to him. There was no reason to mention it; we never played Beatle records around the house, unlike the story that went around that I was sitting in the kitchen for the past five years, playing Beatle records and reliving my past like some kind of Howard Hughes. He did see Yellow Submarine at a friend's, so I had to explain what a cartoon of me was doing in a movie.

PLAYBOY: Does he have an awareness of the Beatles?

LENNON: He doesn't differentiate between the Beatles and Daddy and Mommy. He thinks Yoko was a Beatle too. I don't have Beatle records on the jukebox he listens to. He's more exposed to early rock 'n' roll. He's into "Hound Dog." He thinks it's about hunting.

Sean's not going to public school, by the way. We feel he can learn the three Rs when he wants to—or when the law says he has to, I suppose. I'm not going to fight it. Otherwise, there's no reason for him to be learning to sit still. I can't see; my reason for it. Sean now has plenty of child companionship, which everybody says is important, but he also is with adults a lot. He's adjusted to both.

The reason why kids are crazy is because nobody can face the responsibility of bringing them up. Everybody's too scared to deal with children all the time, so we reject them and send them away and torture them. The ones who survive are the conformists—their bodies are cut to the size of the suits—the ones we label good. The ones who don't fit the suits either are put in mental homes or become artists.

PLAYBOY: Your son, Julian, from your first marriage must be in his teens. Have you seen him over the years?

LENNON: Well, Cyn got possession, or whatever you call it. I got rights to see him on his holidays and all that business, and at least there's an open line still going. It's not the best relationship between father and son, but it is there. He's 17 now. Julian and I will have a relationship in the future. Over the years, he's been able to see through the Beatle image and to see through the image that his mother will have given him, subconsciously or consciously. He's interested in girls and autobikes now. I'm just sort of a figure in the sky, but he's obliged to communicate with me, even when he probably doesn't want to.

PLAYBOY: You're being very honest about your feelings toward him to the point of saying that Sean is your first child. Are you concerned about hurting him?

LENNON: I'm not going to lie to Julian. Ninety percent of the people on this planet, especially in the West, were born out of a bottle of whiskey on a Saturday night, and there was no intent to have children. So 90 percent of us—that includes everybody—were accidents. I don't know anybody who was a planned child. All of us were Saturday-night specials. Julian is in the majority, along with me and everybody else. Sean is a planned child, and therein lies the difference. I don't love Julian any less as a child. He's still my son, whether he came from a bottle of whiskey or because they didn't have pills in those days. He's here, he belongs to me and he always will.

PLAYBOY: Yoko, your relationship with your daughter has been much rockier.

ONO: I lost Kyoko when she was about five. I was sort of an offbeat mother, but we had very good communication. I wasn't particularly taking care of her, but she was always with me—onstage or at gallery shows, whatever. When she was not even a year old, I took her onstage as an instrument—an uncontrollable instrument, you know. My communication with her was on the level of sharing conversation and doing things. She was closer to my ex-husband because of that.

PLAYBOY: What happened when she was five?

ONO: John and I got together and I separated from my ex-husband [*Tony Cox*]. He took Kyoko away. It became a case of parent kidnaping and we tried to get her back.

LENNON: It was a classic case of men being macho. It turned into me and Allen Klein trying to dominate Tony Cox. Tony's attitude was, "You got my wife, but you won't get my child." In this battle, Yoko and the child were absolutely forgotten. I've always felt bad about it. It became a case of the shoot-out at the O.K. Corral: Cox fled to the hills and hid out and the sheriff and I tracked him down. First we won custody in court. Yoko didn't want to go to court, but the men, Klein and I, did it anyway.

ONO: Allen called up one day, saying I won the court case. He gave me a piece of paper. I said. "What is this piece of paper? Is this what I won? I don't have my child." I knew that taking them to court would frighten them and, of course, it did frighten them. So Tony vanished. He was very strong, thinking that the capitalists, with their money and lawyers and detectives, were pursuing him. It made him stronger.

> "Now I may be very positive, but I also go through deep depressions where I would like to jump out the window."

LENNON: We chased him all over the world. God knows where he went. So if you're reading this, Tony, let's grow up about it. It's gone. We don't want to chase you anymore, because we've done enough damage.

ONO: We also had private detectives chasing Kyoko, which I thought was a bad trip too. One guy came to report, "It was great! We almost had them. We were just behind them in a car, but they sped up and got away." I went hysterical. "What do you mean you almost got them? We are talking about my child!"

LENNON: It was like we were after an escaped convict.

PLAYBOY: Were you so persistent because you felt you were better for Kyoko?

LENNON: Yoko got steamed into a guilt thing that if she wasn't attacking them with detectives and police and the FBI, then she wasn't a good mother looking for her baby. She kept saying, "Leave them alone, leave them alone," but they said you can't do that.

ONO: For me, it was like they just disappeared from my life. Part of me left with them.

PLAYBOY: How old is she now?

ONO: Seventeen, the same as John's son.

PLAYBOY: Perhaps when she gets older, she'll seek you out.

ONO: She is totally frightened. There was a time in Spain when a lawyer and John thought that we should kidnap her.

LENNON: [*Sighing*] I was just going to commit hara-kiri first.

ONO: And we did kidnap her and went to court. The court did a very sensible thing—the judge took her into a room and asked her which one of us she wanted to go with. Of course, she said Tony. We had scared her to death. So now she must be afraid that if she comes to see me, she'll never see her father again.

LENNON: When she gets to be in her 20s, she'll understand that we were idiots and we know we were idiots. She might give us a chance.
ONO: I probably would have lost Kyoko even if it wasn't for John. If I had separated from Tony, there would have been some difficulty.
LENNON: I'll just half-kill myself.
ONO: [*To John*] Part of the reason things got so bad was because with Kyoko, it was you and Tony dealing. Men. With your son Julian, it was women—there was more understanding between me and Cyn.
PLAYBOY: Can you explain that?
ONO: For example, there was a birthday party that Kyoko had and we were both invited, but John felt very uptight about it and he didn't go. He wouldn't deal with Tony. But we were both invited to Julian's party and we both went.
LENNON: Oh, God, it's all coming out.
ONO: Or like when I was invited to Tony's place alone, I couldn't go; but when John was invited to Cyn's, he did go.
LENNON: One rule for the men, one for the women.
ONO: So it was easier for Julian, because I was allowing it to happen.
LENNON: But I've said a million Hail Marys. What the hell else can I do?
PLAYBOY: Yoko, after this experience, how do you feel about leaving Sean's rearing to John?
ONO: I am very clear about my emotions in that area. I don't feel guilty. I am doing it in my own way. It may not be the same as other mothers, but I'm doing it the way I can do it. In general, mothers have a very strong resentment toward their children, even though there's this whole adulation about motherhood and how mothers really think about their children and how they really love them. I mean, they do, but it is not humanly possible to retain emotion that mothers are supposed to have within this society. Women are just too stretched out in different directions to retain that emotion. Too much is required of them. So I say to John—
LENNON: I am her favorite husband—
ONO: "I am carrying the baby nine months and that is enough, so you take care of it afterward." It did sound like a crude remark, but I really believe that children belong to the society. If a mother carries the child and a father raises it, the responsibility is shared.
PLAYBOY: Did you resent having to take so much responsibility, John?
LENNON: Well, sometimes, you know, she'd come home and say, "I'm tired." I'd say, only partly tongue in cheek, "What the fuck do you think I am? I'm 24 hours with the baby! Do you think that's easy?" I'd say, "You're going to take some more interest in the child." I don't care whether it's a father or a mother. When I'm going on about pimples and bones and which TV shows to let him watch, I would say, "Listen, this is important. I don't want to hear about your R350.00 million deal tonight!" [*To Yoko*] I would like both parents to take care of the children, but how is a different matter.
ONO: Society should be more supportive and understanding.
LENNON: It's true. The saying "You've come a long way, baby" applies more to me than to her. As Harry Nilsson says, "Everything is the opposite of what it is, isn't it?" It's men who've come a long way from even contemplating the idea of equality. But although there is this thing called the women's movement, society just took a laxative and they've just farted. They haven't really had a good shit yet. The seed was planted sometime in the late '60s, right? But the real changes are coming. I am the one who has come a long way. I was the pig. And it is a relief not to be a pig. The pressures of being a pig were enormous. I don't have any hankering to be looked upon as a sex object, a male, macho rock-'n'-roll singer. I got over that a long time ago. I'm not even interested in projecting that. So I like it to be known that, yes, I looked after the baby and I made bread and I was a househusband and I am proud of it. It's the wave of the future and I'm glad to be in on the forefront of that too.
ONO: So maybe both of us learned a lot about how men and women suffer because of the social structure. And the only way to change it is to be aware of it. It sounds simple, but important things are simple.
PLAYBOY: John, does it take actually reversing roles with women to understand?
LENNON: It did for this man. But don't forget, I'm the one who benefited the most from doing it. Now I can step back and say Sean is going to be five years old and I was able to spend his first five years with him and I am very proud of that. And come to think of it, it looks like I'm going to be 40 and life begins at 40—so they promise. And I believe it, too. I feel fine and I'm very excited. It's like, you know, hitting 21, like, "Wow, what's going to happen next?" Only this time we're together.
ONO: If two are gathered together, there's nothing you can't do.
PLAYBOY: What does the title of your new album, Double Fantasy, mean?
LENNON: It's a flower, a type of freesia, but what it means to us is that if two people picture the same image at the same time, that is the secret. You can be together but projecting two different images and either whoever's the stronger at the time will get his or her fantasy fulfilled or you will get nothing but mishmash.
PLAYBOY: You saw the news item that said you were putting your sex fantasies out as an album.
LENNON: Oh, yeah. That is like when we did the bed-in in Toronto in 1969. They all came charging through the door, thinking we were going to be screwing in bed. Of course, we were just sitting there with peace signs.
PLAYBOY: What was that famous bed-in all about?
LENNON: Our life is our art. That's what the bed-ins were. When we got married, we knew our honeymoon was going to be public, anyway, so we decided to use it to make a statement. We sat in bed and talked to reporters for seven days. It was hilarious. In effect, we were doing a commercial for peace on the front page of the papers instead of a commercial for war.
PLAYBOY: You stayed in bed and talked about peace?
LENNON: Yes. We answered questions. One guy kept going over the point about Hitler: "What do you do about Fascists? How can you have peace when you've got a Hitler?" Yoko said, "I would have gone to bed with him." She said she'd have needed only 10 days with him. People loved that one.
ONO: I said it facetiously, of course. But the point is, you're not going to change the world by fighting. Maybe I was naive about the 10 days with Hitler. After all, it took 13 years with John Lennon. [*She giggles*]
PLAYBOY: What were the reports about your making love in a bag?
ONO: We never made love in a bag. People probably imagined that we were making love. It was just, all of us are in a bag, you know. The point was the outline of the bag, you know, the movement of the bag, how much we see of a person, you know. But, inside, there might be a lot going on. Or maybe nothing's going on.

"Part of me suspects that I'm a loser and the other part of me thinks I'm God almighty."

Beauty & Power

Vanessa Nicole

Model **@msvanessanicole**
Photographer **Ryan Dwyer | @letshoot**
Makeup Artist **Taylor Jazz | @taylor_jazz**

Such an absolute honor to have you on Playboy! Tell us about yourself and your modeling journey so far. It truly is an honor to be featured. I'm a model and creative based in Chicago, and my journey has really evolved from simply being in front of the camera to helping shape the vision behind it. Over time, I began developing concepts for my own shoots, thinking about lighting, mood, wardrobe, and storytelling. I've always been fascinated by the visual world of fashion and editorial photography, and that naturally led me into creative directing my own projects. Along the way, I've had the opportunity to be featured internationally, including in FHM Australia in June 2025 and FHM Sweden in October 2025, which were both exciting milestones for me. Modeling introduced me to the camera, but creative direction is where I truly found my voice. That passion is also what inspired me to begin developing my creative direction brand, Directed by Vanessa, where I'm working toward producing visually driven photo shoots, video shoots, film shoots, and editorial concepts.

What has been the most defining moment in your journey so far? One of the most defining moments has been realizing that I'm not just a model, I'm also a creative. When I started conceptualizing my own shoots and collaborating closely with photographers, it changed everything. Suddenly, I wasn't just showing up to a set; I was helping shape the story, the aesthetic, and the mood of the images. Having my work featured internationally in magazines like FHM Australia and FHM Sweden also reinforced that I was moving in the right direction creatively. Being invited to shoot for Playboy feels like a beautiful validation of that evolution.

How would you describe your personal style? I would describe my style as glamorous, feminine, and a little mysterious. I love classic bombshell influences, silk, lace, elegant silhouettes, but I also like to add a modern femmecfatale edge. As someone who enjoys creative directing, I'm always thinking about the entire visual story: the lighting, the set design, the colors, and the mood. I want every image to feel like a still frame from a cinematic moment.

Best place you have ever been to in the world? One of my favorite places I've been is the Dominican Republic. The beaches are beautiful, the atmosphere is vibrant, and it's the kind of place that makes you slow down and really enjoy life. Traveling somewhere tropical always inspires me creatively.

What was the biggest lesson from your worst breakup? The biggest lesson I learned was the importance of self-respect and knowing your worth. Relationships should add to your life, not take away from it. Sometimes the hardest experiences teach you the most about what you truly deserve.

What's a lesson you've learned that changed the way you see yourself? I learned that confidence is something you build over time. The more you step into who you are and embrace it unapologetically, the more powerful you become. Real confidence comes from knowing your value and trusting your vision.

What's one lifestyle change you made this year that completely transformed you? This year, I really focused on being intentional with my time and energy. I started prioritizing my creative goals, my health, and the environments I put myself in. That shift has helped me focus more on building long-term creative projects, including the development of my creative direction brand, Directed by Vanessa.

What does being featured in a magazine in 2026 represent for you at this stage of your journey? It represents stepping into a bigger chapter of my career. Being featured in a magazine like Playboy isn't just about the photos; it's about being recognized as someone who embodies confidence, beauty, and individuality. For me, it symbolizes growth, ambition, and believing in my creative vision, both as a model and as someone expanding into creative direction.

If you could write a letter to your younger self, what would you say? I would tell her to believe in herself sooner and not worry so much about what other people think. The things that make you different are usually the things that make you powerful.

What's a childhood dream you've held on to? I've always loved the idea of being part of something iconic whether that was modeling, being in magazines, or creating imagery that people remember. That dream never really left me.

Looking back, what advice would you give to your younger self? Trust your instincts and don't settle for situations or people that don't align with your vision for your life.

What do people often get wrong about you? Sometimes people assume that if someone is confident or glamorous, they must be superficial. In reality, I'm very thoughtful and intentional about what I do and the life I'm building.

Do you have any hidden talents? If so, what is it? A lot of people don't realize how much I love creative direction. I genuinely enjoy developing concepts for photoshoots, everything from the aesthetic to the mood and storytelling. That passion is what inspired me to begin developing Directed by Vanessa, where my goal is to create visually striking editorial concepts and collaborate with photographers, stylists, and brands. Over time, I'd love to expand into producing larger visual projects and creative campaigns.

What's one lesson from your journey that you wish you'd learned earlier? That consistency matters more than perfection. If you keep showing up and working toward your vision, things eventually start aligning.

What makes you the ultimate partner to have? Loyalty, communication, and positive energy. I believe the best relationships are built on mutual respect, support, and genuinely enjoying life together.

When people look back at this moment in your career, what do you hope it represents about who you are? I hope it represents someone who believed in herself and wasn't afraid to take ownership of her creative vision. Modeling introduced me to an incredible world, but creative direction is where I truly found my voice. My long-term goal is to continue growing creatively and eventually produce visual projects for major publications and media platforms like Vogue, Elle, and Harper's Bazaar, as well as film and streaming studios such as Netflix, Amazon Studios, and Lionsgate.

What's one goal you didn't hit last year that you're determined to achieve this time? One of my biggest goals is continuing to expand creatively and further develop Directed by Vanessa. I'd love to collaborate on larger editorial projects and campaigns where I can combine modeling with creative direction and storytelling. You can follow my journey and see my latest work on Instagram at @msvanessanicole.

1984

Playboy Interview

Jesse Jackson

A candid conversation with the preacher and presidential candidate about his controversial views and the leadership of black America

WRITTEN BY **ROBERT SCHEER** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RON SEYMOUR**

No matter what eventually happens at the Democratic Convention this summer in San Francisco, Jesse Jackson has already won some big prizes. Since he announced for the presidency last November, the panache, pace and ever-present controversy of his candidacy have transformed the sharp-dressing, eloquent 42-year-old Baptist minister and civil rights activist from a party irritant to a force at large.

Jackson has been prominent on the national scene ever since his days as a college activist in his native South during the 1960s, when he followed the call of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to complete the emancipation of blacks through nonviolent civil disobedience. Born to segregation in Greenville, South Carolina, Jackson emerged in his college days as a hero to those intimidated by racists and Southern sheriffs and as a firebrand to those who found segregation less offensive than the turmoil of the civil rights movement.

He was with Dr. King in Memphis at the time of his assassination and moved forcibly—some thought too forcibly—to provide leadership to a movement suddenly deprived of King's overshadowing presence. Returning to his base in Chicago to organize the poor for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the then-27-year-old minister came to be known for a fiery rhetoric that did not always seem to jibe with the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence, which Jackson espouses.

His experiences in the early civil rights movement and later in Push, the anti-poverty and self-help organization he founded, left Jackson with many admirers and detractors—but few who are indifferent. To many, especially in the black community, he is talked about with a reverence and adulation that would seem appropriate for a combination of saint and rock star. To many others—surprisingly, as much among liberals as in the strongholds of white racism—he is seen as a scourge and an opportunist.

Now, in the 1984 presidential campaign, Jackson is a player on the highest level. Mixing Bible Belt moralizing with a fierce commitment to dispossessed constituencies—from gays to Indians and, some would add, Arabs—he sparked the Democratic race with both his candidacy and his daring mission to Syria to free a captured airman, Lieutenant Robert Goodman, Jr. Before Senator Gary Hart began to give Walter Mondale a run for his money in New Hampshire, columnist Jack Anderson wrote, "The Reverend Jesse Jackson, bless his heart, has succeeded single-handedly in lifting the Democratic presidential race out of the terminal doldrums that threaten to bore us all to death." Others who concede the effectiveness of Jackson's thundering oratory nevertheless charge that his style smacks of demagoguery. "In passing out misinformation, the Democrats now have their own Ronald Reagan," wrote the Washington Post's Richard Cohen.

Like it or not, Jackson reached center stage, representing not only blacks but a much larger constituency within the Democratic Party. As The New York Times put it recently, "Jackson is now making history, not as a black presidential candidate but as a 'serious' black presidential candidate. That development alone is likely to have far-reaching effects on the American political scene by energizing the black vote and by altering the perceptions among whites of black candidates for elective office."

But the Times indicated that the real prize lay beyond electoral politics and concerns, involving nothing less than the mantle of black leadership, one passed around or, more accurately, grasped at but never comfortably worn since an assassin's bullet killed King 16 years ago. What Jackson "really seeks to be," the Times noted, is "the nation's premier black leader: a mover and shaker with a constituency within the Democratic Party."

Jackson denies that he wants to be the predominant black leader and dutifully ticks off the names of the scores of elected black officials he holds in high esteem. But whatever his intentions, the enormous publicity surrounding his campaign, as well as his proven ability to attract what he calls the Rainbow Coalition of supporters—including many whites—makes Jackson a man for more than just this electoral season. (In fact, this is his second appearance in the Playboy Interview slot. His first was in November 1969, just over a year and a half after King's death.)

Jackson watching is not a placid journalistic assignment. The reverend has a lot of ups and downs, with contretemps dotting his candidacy at almost every stop.

Just what significance should be attached to the various charges ranging from financial mismanagement of Push to "tainted" contributions from the Arab League? Why does Jackson say the things he says? Is he against whites? Is he against Jews? And if not, what is the fuss in the media all about? Could it be, as the reverend thinks, that he has been subjected to a double standard of criticism because he is the first black man to run seriously for the presidency?

Given Jackson's prominence, the answers to those questions will remain important long after the election. To try to get some of them, Playboy assigned Robert Scheer, whose political reporting for PLAYBOY (Interviews with Jerry Brown and Jimmy Carter, profiles of Nelson Rockefeller and Ronald Reagan) is well known to its readers. Scheer, a national reporter for the Los Angeles Times, followed Jackson through the early primaries and filed the following report:

"Jesse Jackson is hard to ignore. He is tall, muscular, bright and quick and uses all of that to let an interviewer know that he intends to finish his thoughts. Looking down on the questioner, he rears back and rocks a bit, punctuating the air with his finger while the cadenced statements roll on and on until the point to be made is wrapped and delivered. Then, and only then, another question. Jackson takes questions cheerfully but with the air of one who has heard most of them before. And he has. All of his adult life has been spent parrying questions about blacks and politics, and he knows what he knows. He does not require issues experts, pollsters and media analysts to figure out his stance.

"Jackson most often listens to a question with his head slightly tilted to suggest a cocked ear and with just the barest hint of a condescending smile about to flicker across his otherwise passive face. On those occasions when the question is not familiar, a suspicion as to the interviewer's motives may mark his manner, and the mood can get tense—not threatening but suddenly more serious and personal than one had bargained for. It's less a matter of intimidation than one of the force of personality and presence of someone who's battle-scarred.

"Like Ronald Reagan, whom I have also interviewed at some length, Jackson is a veteran of past battles over issues that truly matter to him. And while he may—again, like Reagan—occasionally get some facts wrong and exaggerate others, he remains committed to core beliefs.

"For Jackson, those beliefs revolve around whatever he feels is necessary for the advancement of blacks, and while one may take issue with his preoccupation or his prescriptions for change, personal exposure to the man did not, in my case, support a cynical view of his level of commitment.

"Both Jackson and Reagan are clearly in the political arena to do serious battle over the social direction of this country, no matter what other material and psychological rewards may be provided by the exercise. For both, it has been a long and not always fashionable political struggle.

"Neither gentleman is of the school of the modern politician touted by hip pollsters and committed only to winning. Jackson and Reagan may say and do wrong things, but when they do, it is with the altruistic aplomb of the true believer certain of the virtue of his ends and convinced that he is not driven by personal political ambition. And when they do commit a grand gaffe, they find it next to impossible to offer a profound apology, because soul-searching and doubt are simply alien to their makeup. But they are not shallow. Both have paid their dues, anguishing over causes rather than over the political style of the moment.

"There the similarity ends. Indeed, what is perhaps most interesting about Jackson is that he has risen to challenge the assumptions of Reaganism as a political philosophy more directly and energetically than has any of the other candidates.

"After hours of interviews with Jackson, I found myself fantasizing about Reagan's taking my place in the room. Let them argue about the truly needy, about affirmative action, civil disobedience and the Third World. Let them match programs for ending poverty and crime in Chicago and bringing peace to the Middle East. Do we need more weapons or fewer? More social programs or fewer? Is God, whom they both invoke incessantly, a staunch free enterpriser or a closet liberal? Now, that would be the debate for this election year.

"But Jackson will not just go away after this election any more than Reagan did following his many times out on the hustings. Both have a

constituency. Jackson may not have succeeded in building his Rainbow Coalition, but his campaign has demonstrated his basic appeal to the growing number of black voters. Thus, what Jackson has to say in this campaign and in this Interview warrants serious attention, for it will likely present itself again and with even greater force in the future."

PLAYBOY: As we speak, it looks as if either Hart or Mondale will be the Democratic nominee. What do you see as the difference between you and them?

JACKSON: As Democrats, we share many common social values. But I believe they represent liberalism, which is advocacy for change; I represent liberation, which is action for change. They hoped Goodman would be released from Syria; I went to get him. They supported the Voting Rights Act; I marched for it. They call for U.S. corporations to become more responsive; I had to boycott them to get change. They say they have no objection to a woman as vice president; I say, "Put one on the ticket."

PLAYBOY: But will those differences stop you from backing either of them if one is the Democratic nominee?

JACKSON: No. I'm not trying to impeach their characters; I'm just drawing a distinction. I'm saying that within the framework of the Democratic Party, I've paid heavier dues in the struggle for social justice than either of those two men.

PLAYBOY: However you fare in the presidential race, your Rainbow Coalition calls for unity among the poor, women, the handicapped, gays, people of all colors. Is that realistic?

JACKSON: Yes. I guess what's impressed me, what's almost seemed miraculous, is that there is less static about the Rainbow Coalition than there was about integration. Somehow, many groups are very threatened by integration—it conjures up so many fears and negative conceptions—yet the message in the Rainbow Coalition is the same: It's just that you can be black, brown, yellow or red or gay or rich or poor and you still fit in the spectrum without being threatened.

PLAYBOY: You're claiming to be more than a black candidate. Why are you optimistic that white America would support a black man?

JACKSON: Well, since Reagan took office, the nation has undergone a devastating period of racial and class polarization and a kind of willful perpetuation of the gender gap. Most Americans find that distasteful. The sense of selfishness and greed of the present administration has set a climate in the country that most Americans don't identify with in their heart of hearts. So there is a search now by people to go another way, to seek a new course. When I walked through the plant of The Boston Globe recently, you could hear workers, many of whom had Archie Bunker as a frame of reference, cheering, telling me, "I'm glad you brought the boy [*Lieutenant Goodman*] back home!" We are growing up as a nation. Those guys probably didn't want Sam Jethroe to play baseball for the Boston Braves, probably heckled Sam Jones and K. C. Jones when they played for the Celtics. And though Boston went through a period of Louise Day Hicks–type polarization, the city obviously prefers the image of Mel King and the Rainbow Coalition to that of Hicks and the rocks and the buses.

Another reason the Rainbow Coalition isn't threatening is that there are no psychological or sexual hang-ups, as there are in integration. There are deep-seated fears in this country, perpetuated over a long period of time, that are based on sexual myths, on the fear of interracial marriage. It's the old Archie Bunker thing: We can work together and you can play ball with us and go to school with us, even socialize with us, but don't come home with us. The Rainbow Coalition is made up of independent groups—you don't have to lose your group's identity to another group. It's not threatening on the personal level.

PLAYBOY: One group that does feel threatened is the Jewish community. In fact, a couple of your statements about Jews have nearly derailed your campaign. Let's settle them once and for all. Why did you use the word Hymies in referring to Jews?

JACKSON: It was unfortunate. That word never had a negative meaning to it, either politically or religiously. It was an unfortunate use of words, but no different from someone's saying he's going up to Harlem to see "Mose" or "Mosela." You know, said with a lighthearted ring. And at least some people realized that. When I spoke recently in Tallahassee, there were some Jewish people holding up a big 12-by-12-foot sign saying, Hymies Love Jesse.

Historically, the word kike was equivalent to the word nigger, which is a very offensive term. If I had been angry and said, "You kike," or, "You nigger," that would have been different. But it was blown up into something far beyond— Well, we'll almost have to put the word Hymie into the dictionary now, because it's taken on so much meaning. And I do regret the pain it caused people because of the way the press played it.

The disadvantage was the personal hurt to these people. But there's been an advantage: There is now a dialog under way that hasn't existed in a decade. And that's a consolation I find sufficient, because strong leaders are not perfect, we're public servants. When Jimmy Carter made his statement about ethnic purity, people forgave him, because they realized that didn't reflect his basic character. Last summer, Ted Koppel referred to some politicians as "Amos and Andy." It was an unfortunate use of words, but that's not his basic character. Just recently, Bill Moyers referred to me on TV as the "Kingfish of black politicians." When I pointed out that the word Kingfish might be seen as insensitive because of the Kingfish character in the Amos 'N Andy show, he said he was referring to Huey Long. You see how sensitive people can be?

PLAYBOY: You said the flap over your remarks had a good side to it. Are you serious?

JACKSON: I hope we can seize the moment. There's been more interest in meetings between blacks and Jews in the past eight or 10 days than there has been in the past eight or 10 years. But, of course, until now, it's just been a war of quotations—who said what last, which is very unhealthy. It's been a period of great agony, but I think we're going to come out of it.

PLAYBOY: You've portrayed yourself as a potential mediator among Jews, blacks and Arabs. Especially now, though, would most Jewish groups ever accept your position on the Mideast?

JACKSON: Well, I may never accept the Israeli position on South Africa, either; but we can talk. We can agree to disagree. You know, a number of Jewish people here and in Israel have written to me, asking for help in getting their relatives out of Syria. Okay? Now, the people who don't talk with their perceived enemies can't help them; isn't that right? Mondale, Glenn, Hart. The idea of not talking with a friend's enemies is not a wise strategy. The biggest contribution one could make to Israel would be to get her neighbors to recognize her, to end the armed struggle, to end the holy war. And now, through all the chaos and confusion, I emerge with the capacity to talk to both sides.

PLAYBOY: Including the P.L.O.?

JACKSON: I think the P.L.O. has to recognize Israel's right to exist. But I don't think either Israel or the P.L.O. can initiate the talks that would be required for each side to recognize the other, the way Israel and Egypt couldn't do it themselves. They needed a mediator. If we had the strength of leadership to negotiate that strategy, the P.L.O. would change its position of not recognizing Israel.

PLAYBOY: Even though it's written into the covenant of the P.L.O. that Israel should be destroyed?

JACKSON: Nasser made a statement 20 to 25 years ago about driving the Jews into the sea, and the nation of the guy who made that statement has now signed a peace treaty with Israel. If you keep digging up last year's rhetoric about a given situation, you'll never move forward to forgiveness and redemption. There have been some pretty cruel things said about each other by both sides, which is standard for people who are angry at each other.

PLAYBOY: Which brings us back to another of the things you said about Jews. Why did you say you were tired of hearing about the Jewish holocaust?

JACKSON: It was a statement taken completely out of context. In 1971 or 1972, I was in Africa with my wife and the Staple Singers and Roberta Flack. We decided to go see where the slaves had been kept. We were taken to some caves. They were damp and ugly, and what had started out as a tourist visit became quietness and then singing and prayers and tears. By the time we got out at the other end, there was a kind of anger, a real resentment among us. But then I said to my wife, "You know, if we

rehearsed this slavery ritual every day, or often, we could develop the kind of resentment toward the blacks who sold us and the whites who captured and then enslaved us that would never lend itself to making human progress. I would just be so bitter!"

Later, in a private talk with two guys, I referred to the Jewish holocaust in that context. We had seen several references to the holocaust on television that year, and I said that while I appreciated the memory of it as a basis for saying "Never again," we really had to move beyond that and not linger at the graveside. That was analogous to our own experience, having come through the holocaust of slavery, having lost 30 million or 40 million people in slavery. My remark was one of personal experience, not one that was designed to be negative or hostile. That was the context of that statement, because I, too, am a member of a race that has known a holocaust and has known subjugation in this land, not just as a matter of history but as a matter of personal experience. I look at those striped uniforms that the Jews wore in those Nazi camps and I recall that I grew up watching the police act like Nazis every weekend and lock up blacks, charging them with vagrancy, making them wear striped uniforms and putting chains on their ankles. What they really were looking for were street cleaners they wouldn't have to pay, and they'd sentence a black to 10 days in prison for being drunk on his own porch and stuff like that. So it wasn't the first time I had seen those striped uniforms.

PLAYBOY: Nonetheless, didn't you also call Zionism a "poisonous weed"?

JACKSON: Again, it was out of context. That was said during a debate about Zionism, which is built upon the premise of race, while Judaism is built upon faith. Now, there's been an attempt by some to equate the two. But the state of Israel is not the state of Judaism. Zionism is not a religion, it's a political philosophy. Many Zionists are, in fact, agnostics and atheists. Judaism is built upon faith and forgiveness and is really an optimistic view of the future, and Zionism tends to be much more narrow than that. Having said that, I believe Jews have a right to be Zionist politically, but one need not equate Judaism and Zionism. And I accept the right of Israel to exist. The fact is that from a religious standpoint, there is something about Judaism that appeals to me. I'm Judeo-Christian; my religious roots are there. There is a kind of boldness, a kind of universality, espoused in the faith that is eternal. And I just don't equate the two.

"Many whites did, temporarily, what blacks must do eternally—fight for equality. Some whites say, 'I marched in Selma.' It was an experience to write home about. But some of us had to stay after the march."

PLAYBOY: Then what does it mean to say that Zionism is a poisonous weed?

JACKSON: If people lose religious faith, which is eternal, and begin to put their faith in a political arrangement, which is temporary, well, one to me represents oxygen and flowering and growth, while the other represents the choking of that growth. To the extent that my description was offensive, I regret it, because my point is not to be offensive.

PLAYBOY: But to some people, your denunciation of Zionism was another way of denying Israel's legitimacy.

JACKSON: Well, to the extent that it was misunderstood, I regret it. Right now, of course, we're going well beyond the context we were in when I said it. Many Jews, as you know, reject Zionism. They see it as very bad, so it's not just a personal position I have. And historically, the best experience of the Jewish people has been in their religious faith, the chastising, courageous strength of the prophets who challenged their own politicians. I mean, historically, a guy like Menachem Begin would have been challenged far more strongly by the Jewish prophets, and maybe the prophetic voice in Israel today tends to be that of the Peace Now movement.

PLAYBOY: You're talking about the leftist coalition in Israel—but a lot of them would consider themselves Zionists, too, so you wouldn't get much support there. It seems as if politicians get deeper in trouble when they try to explain things away instead of just admitting they made a mistake. Wouldn't it be better to just say that your use of the phrase poisonous weed was a lousy choice of words?

JACKSON: I don't know what your point is. You almost sound as if you're trying to chastise me, which I'm beginning to resent. I'm trying to say, as clearly as I can, that my point is that Zionism and Judaism are different things. Why keep wrestling with it?

PLAYBOY: That's precisely our point. You keep wrestling with a phrase that most people think is anti-Israeli, if not anti-Semitic, instead of saying it was a mistake and being done with it.

JACKSON: I've said that about five times a night. I mean, to the extent to which it's offensive, I regret it, because that was not what my intent was. And I think that the more that journalists like yourself keep dwelling on that—

PLAYBOY: We're trying to clear it up, not dwell on it.

JACKSON: Okay. Well, I made a mistake. There is a sensitivity to the phrase that I underestimated, frankly. You simply walk into buzz saws by hitting the wrong buzz words. Even with most people I know who are in conflict with Jewish people on a given issue, that conflict is not for the most part philosophical, it's usually political.

PLAYBOY: That's true, but since the Peace Now people in Israel consider themselves Zionists, they don't consider Zionism a poisonous weed. That was what we were trying to clarify.

JACKSON: I understand.

PLAYBOY: And if you said to one of them, "Zionism is a poisonous weed," it would be the end of the dialog, because they see themselves as Zionists who are nonetheless in favor of such moves as returning the West Bank to the Arabs.

JACKSON: I agree. And I tend to identify with their politics, because I think there is righteousness there, a quest for fair play. I think that they will be capable of coexisting with the Palestinians in ways that will be beneficial for them as well as for world peace. The talks we had with them when we were in Israel were enjoyable experiences that have etched a lasting place in my memory.

PLAYBOY: Do you regret having been caught up in all this?

JACKSON: No, I tremble from the pain of it all, but I see a silver lining beyond the dark cloud. The whole period has been a crucifying experience for all of us. I think that joy is coming in the morning. It's almost like you have to go through a crucifixion before you can get to a resurrection. I can feel the stone being rolled away.

PLAYBOY: You've said that other experiences etched in your memory are responsible for your view of the world. Back when segregation was widespread, was there one experience that had a profound effect on you?

JACKSON: Yes. There was a store in Greenville, South Carolina, that was typical of the black South. It was owned by whites, because black people seldom owned any stores, and the owner's children grew up with the rest of us, so you were allowed to play with them. But as they grew to replace their father in business, they began to grow in their father's ways. They began to take on the likeness of the master. I used to play with the children of Jack, the store owner.

This particular day, I was in a hurry, because my grandfather was outside and he gave me a nickel to get some Mary Janes and cookies

or something. There were eight or ten black people in there, and I said, "Jack, can I have a cookie?" He had been cutting bologna or something. I whistled for his attention. Suddenly, he was on me with a gun pointed at my head. He said, "Never whistle at me again!" The thing that stood out in my mind was that the other blacks who were in the store acted as if they didn't see it. They stayed busy. They had a deep and abiding fear. I was not so much afraid of the gun as I was of what my father would do. He had just gotten back from World War II, and I knew he had not only a temper but a mind that had been opened up after being exposed to Europe during the war. He had become more resentful of the system. I knew that if my father heard about it, he'd either kill Jack or get killed. So I suppressed it. It came out many years later. But that was the nature of life in the occupied zone.

PLAYBOY: You've kept your own resentments fairly well suppressed through this campaign. In fact, overall, your views are a lot less strident than they were during your first Interview with us. You were pretty tough on the white establishment in 1969. You were only 28 then, right?

JACKSON: Yes.

PLAYBOY: You were a kid.

JACKSON: Yes. In many ways.

PLAYBOY: How have you changed?

JACKSON: I've matured, obviously. People mature or they rot. I've been blessed. A lot of people have allowed me to grow, have been tolerant of my mistakes. I've maintained my will to work, but I've needed a lot of help from people in keeping my equilibrium. I've grown up in a goldfish bowl, with the temptations and oppressions of this job, learning to use public admiration and prestige with prudence and discipline.

PLAYBOY: When you say you grew up in a goldfish bowl, do you mean you've held a prominent position since you were young?

JACKSON: Yes. I was a big deal in home-town football at 13; you know, being the quarterback and hearing your name over the loud-speaker. That was a kind of public exposure. Then there was college football and student activities, all that. And in Greensboro, I became prominent in the civil rights movement, went to jail as sort of a hero in 1965. So it's been almost 30 years of that life, nonstop. There've been lots of opportunities and a lot of growing up to do. I'm glad I chose this work, glad this work chose me.

"Ultimately, the poor do not just want liberal friends, they want to be empowered."

PLAYBOY: What do you actually do about the pressure, the tension? You don't drink; do you exercise, work out?

JACKSON: I play basketball sometimes. I read. No, I think. I've been blessed with a creative mind, you know, and while some people tend to read in their spare time, I think in mine. Reading is looking back and wrestling with other people's ideas. But when you think, you can focus on your own ideas. A big difference.

PLAYBOY: What's an example?

JACKSON: Take the election of Harold Washington, Chicago's first black mayor. Before the election, Walter Mondale came to town to support Richard Daley's son, while Ted Kennedy came to support then-mayor Jane Byrne. In other words, the progressive wing of the Democratic Party was moving to the right. What could we do? Most people got upset. I said, "We've got to figure a way out of this. Think. Hear me? Think!" Now, we couldn't just wring our hands and act as if Jack, the old store owner back in Greenville, were holding a gun to our heads and we couldn't tell our daddy. This time, we had to have a plan! Our liberal allies, Kennedy and Mondale, come riding into town with smoking guns, supporting party regulars over the progressive black candidate. Most folks looked at it and pretended it didn't happen. But it did happen. If Kennedy and Mondale had had their way, Washington wouldn't have won. If it had been left to them, the rise of the black political movement would have been stopped, stillborn. So what do you do? You can't go Republican; that's too devastatingly right wing. Can't stay with the Democrats as they are, right? So take them on in the primaries! Aha! The best of both worlds. You can act, challenge the Democrats in their own primaries, challenge the Republicans in the general election, do all of it! Think. I couldn't have gotten that reading a book. There hasn't been any book written on this.

PLAYBOY: So that's really the origin of your campaign—trying to counter what you see as Kennedy's and Mondale's defections?

JACKSON: Yes. I heard about it on the news. I couldn't believe it. How can progressive Democrats make a commitment to Chicago—which is 40 percent black and 15 percent Hispanic and only three percent Irish—and choose two Irish candidates over the black candidate? But I'm not angry now; look what the result was: this campaign. It's like a child born out of wedlock, as I was—you aren't angry forever that your father isn't around. If it's negative that he's not there, it's positive that you were born. So you focus on the positive and keep on steppin'.

PLAYBOY: And this campaign, no matter what happens at the convention, is positive as far as blacks are concerned?

JACKSON: Blacks will never again be taken for granted. Politics in America is quite different tonight from what it was a year ago. Quite different.

PLAYBOY: All right, back to your candidacy. As a civil rights activist, you've never even held public office. Isn't it presumptuous of you to run for president? Do you think you're equipped to deal with substantial foreign-policy matters?

JACKSON: The media projection of me as being not involved in foreign policy, not aware of what our options are, is a misperception of reality. I've met with most African heads of state, most Arab heads of state, and I've traveled throughout Europe. I went down to Panama, trying to get the Panama Canal treaty through. I made major presentations on Salt II, trying to get that passed. Our leaders have an obligation to meet the other leaders of the world to establish rapport. Everybody knows that the personal relationship between Kennedy and Khrushchev was crucial in that period. All of life really does boil down to personal relationships. Legend says that war and peace often start and end in the bedroom. The woman asks the man, "Are you going to take that from that guy?" So the guy declares war. If Andropov and Reagan had met each other and communicated and expressed their common desire to avoid mutual annihilation, with a real desire to do it, those two men could have relieved tension in this world, but they didn't know each other. So they talked at each other rather than relate to each other, and that violent noncommunication has us on the brink of disaster.

PLAYBOY: It's your view of the Third World that separates you from most other leaders in this country. How would you change America's relationship with it?

JACKSON: Well, America looks upon the Third World with a lot of arrogance and contempt. Some of our contempt for Third World nations is based upon their poverty, some of it is based upon their color, some of it is built upon our relationship with the oppressors of those societies. Some of it is based upon our corporations' exploitative relationship with those nations. The reasons we do this are essentially immoral or contemptuous. The Third World is mostly poor, uneducated, diseased, desperate for human rights, desperate for economic development, more inclined toward America than toward the Soviet Union. It's mostly black, brown, yellow, red, non-Christian, non-English-speaking. So why waste all the time on the East-West, U.S.A.-and-U.S.S.R. aspect of the problem?

PLAYBOY: So you'd agree with George McGovern that we have a fixation on communism?

JACKSON: Oh, he's right about that. As opposed to affirming our point of view, we've found ourselves running from another point of view. Anybody who rebels we call a Communist. In the South, we were fighting for civil rights, basic public accommodations. We were called Communists. Fighting for the right to vote, we were called Communists. So if the peasants fight to overcome the landed gentry, calling them Communists does

not make them so. And even when they get desperate—when we refuse support because they're also getting aid from another area—that doesn't mean that they agree with that other viewpoint. If a man is drowning, he'll reach for any raft; it's his only way of surviving. We should be putting life rafts into the water rather than toxic waste.

PLAYBOY: But communism is a fact of life in some parts of Latin America. What would you do about it?

JACKSON: We should open a dialog with Cuba and normalize relations. Among other things, Cuba is 90 miles away. If we can relate to Soviet communism, we certainly can relate to Cuba's. Also, by ignoring Cuba, we make it bigger; we make Castro bigger than he really is. We allowed ourselves to be put in the position of Goliath, with Castro as David, and the longer we boycott him and he survives without us, the longer it makes him the hero of South, Central and Latin America and the Caribbean. For the most part, I am convinced, Cubans would rather relate to this country than to the Soviet Union. Among other reasons, we're hemispheric partners. I think we make a mistake in not opening up trade with Cuba.

PLAYBOY: What about Nicaragua and the Sandinistas?

JACKSON: I cannot separate the Nicaraguan revolution from the tyranny of [*former dictator*] Somoza and our investment in his tyranny. We should recognize Nicaragua, we should open up dialog with its leaders, we should stop supporting the rebels militarily, because we're losing the war and losing prestige. We are losing that war and losing credibility throughout the Third World because we're engaging in that war. We ought to be more patient with Third World nations in their transitions for development. After all, there was a 10- or 12-year difference between General George Washington and President George Washington. We ourselves had to evolve into a more mature democracy. A substantial number of people got the right to vote 100 years after that. So for us to try to make them do in three years what we didn't do in 12 years is unfair. And we ought to help stabilize that government, help correct through diplomacy and trade the wrongs that are there and not disrupt the people of that government with an attempted military overthrow.

PLAYBOY: When Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., first criticized U.S. foreign policy—i.e., the Vietnam war—he encountered more controversy than he'd known as a civil rights leader. Did his experience make it easier for you to speak out?

JACKSON: Oh, I'm convinced of that. I remember very well the adverse reaction to Dr. King's decision to come out against the Vietnam war in 1967. I read his remarks in the Hilton Hotel for the first time the morning he made his speech—all the reasons we should get out of Vietnam. I remember that after the speech, we went on an 11-city tour we'd planned with Aretha Franklin and Harry Belafonte to raise money for civil rights causes. Well, we broke even in only one city, because Lyndon Johnson put so much pressure on both black and white Democratic Party structures. We hit the stage in Oakland—imagine, with both Aretha Franklin and Harry Belafonte—and, unbelievably, the place was only one-fourth full. We went on to Houston. We stepped onto the stage. All of a sudden, there was gas in the air-supply system and we had to evacuate the auditorium. It was a very violent atmosphere, and it continued that way until King was assassinated.

Many blacks, some of them his classmates, publicly disavowed him, because he really was breaking new ground. He moved us from the civil rights struggle to a global outlook on the human-rights struggle. Prior to that time, it was considered a kind of treason to challenge the country's war policies. King opened up that window for everybody.

PLAYBOY: Which black leaders told him not to criticize the Vietnam war?

JACKSON: I remember Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, Whitney Young of the Urban League and many other civil rights leaders who castigated King for dividing the civil rights movement. But King's point was, you couldn't separate the two—money that had been designated for the War on Poverty was going to the war in Vietnam.

PLAYBOY: Now that there's a national holiday for King, do you think we tend to remember him for his more acceptable achievements rather than for his more controversial positions?

JACKSON: All societies emasculate their martyrs in time. If those martyrs had been as socially acceptable in life as they are in death, they wouldn't have died the way they did. They were really on the cutting edge of change; they were engaging in social change, not just in social service. They were victims of a character assassination that preceded their physical assassination. The big issue, of course, in the case of King, is that the U.S. government was involved in it. One of J. Edgar Hoover's memos said the government's purpose was to destroy the black movement and to stop the rise of the black messiah. Hoover called King a liar and a Communist. Given the FBI's role in trying to discredit him, it's not difficult to believe that it was also involved in destroying him.

PLAYBOY: How?

JACKSON: Well, given Hoover's personal hatred of him, there is no limit to what role the FBI may have had in his assassination. James Earl Ray was able to get out of Memphis, and then out of the country, very easily. I believe he was the fall guy in a much bigger scheme. King was seen not only by paranoid FBI agents but by hawks of that day as a threat to national security. It was absurd, but that's how they perceived him.

PLAYBOY: After King's death, you became very bitter about whites. You said in your first Playboy Interview, less than two years after King's death, that white students didn't have to worry about poverty, because their fathers sent them to school and they could avoid the draft; that they weren't really serious about civil rights; they didn't support Operation Breadbasket and projects of that sort.

JACKSON: Well, many whites in the South did, temporarily, what blacks must do eternally—fight for rights, fight for equality. I see a lot of them today who say, "I went to Selma; I was in such and such a march." Yes, that was an experience to write home about. But some of us had to stay when the march was over.

PLAYBOY: Some whites died.

JACKSON: Indeed, some whites died. Some blacks died and some whites died. As to how I felt after King's death, I'm not sure I was as bitter as I was hurt. I mean, I saw our leadership wasted, and I also saw the government turn its back on us. The Johnson Administration, which blacks had voted for and had high hopes for, turned its back on us. That caused a great deal of pain. Many of the members of our civil rights alliance who had helped became very unkind as we sought to move up. As long as everything was horizontal, it was fine, but they fought vertical movement. They wanted to remove the shame of apartheid, but they did not want to share the power. The Bakke reverse-discrimination suit was a major turning point for relations in the coalition that made the civil rights gains of the '60s possible.

PLAYBOY: Would you use a word such as betrayal about former civil rights allies?

JACKSON: I don't choose to use that word, only because it would not serve a good end. Our friends simply went so far but did not go far enough. Ultimately, the poor do not just want friends, they want to be empowered. And when you start speaking of empowering the poor, then you have to redistribute the power of those who already have it. And some of those who already had it may have been our close allies.

Maybe we had to go through a period of adjustment, moving from liberalism to liberation. We had to break the dependency syndrome. I remember in Gary, Indiana, we had a white guy who was basically a liberal as the mayor. But Richard Hatcher said our time has come, so what you had was a struggle between liberals and blacks for the mayor's office—conservatives had already fled town. And as blacks began to win, it changed the fundamental relationship. We moved from one born of paternalism to one of power. But for the most part, blacks in city government and in Congress replaced liberals, not conservatives.

PLAYBOY: All right, but didn't black extremists make some pretty large mistakes along the way? Wasn't there a costly, unnecessary alienation?

JACKSON: When you have a new life, like a baby coming into the world, you're going to have some pain. After so many years of swelling up, as we had, the water breaks and the blood flies and the mother sighs and the baby cries. But then you clean up the afterbirth material; you accept new life as the reality. I remember when there was so much tension about my running in the Democratic primaries—it would traumatize the party, traumatize every candidate, including blacks, they said. It

would divide the country, they said. But now they see the positive effects. The progressive wing of the party is alive again, and the only chance the Democratic Party has of winning is with the margin of new voters I bring to the banquet tables. The party's expanding, not dividing. There's creative tension; issues are being raised that otherwise would not be raised. We've brought an excitement to the campaign and a style of campaigning that mobilizes people. So, you know, sometimes our worst fears are never realized, and we grow up and we move on.

PLAYBOY: Let us move on to your well-publicized dealings with Syria. Although its release of Lieutenant Goodman helped your campaign, would you agree it's an extremely repressive country?

JACKSON: Oh, it certainly is. Absolutely, you should apply the same standards everywhere, anywhere.

PLAYBOY: You don't disagree, then, that Syria, Libya and Saudi Arabia all have repressive regimes?

JACKSON: Well, to the extent to which they have them, they must be challenged. It doesn't serve any good end, it seems to me, just to call them repressive. We must make our position clear and link our relationship and our support to the enforcement of human rights. If Reagan's constructive engagement with South Africa meant that it would be used to change conditions there, that would be all right. I think that as a superpower, we ought to relate to all these countries. But we should then use our leverage to bring about change, because we will end up on one side of history or the other—either with those who are denying human rights or with those who are supporting them.

PLAYBOY: All right, but when you accept money from the Arab League, some people feel you can't claim you're merely supporting human rights for Arabs; you are actually doing business with some very repressive Arab regimes, including Syria's. It's a contradiction for someone who's concerned about human rights to be accepting that sort of support.

JACKSON: Well, the fact is, the Israelis are holding people under occupation and annexing territory and engaging in expansion, building settlements in violation of the law. At some point, that has to give way to a more democratic relationship with neighbors.

PLAYBOY: We'll get back to the Middle East, but the heart of your campaign has been a call for more federal programs rather than fewer. Yet one thing we've heard from other Democratic candidates this year is that the social programs of the 1960s that you favored simply didn't work.

JACKSON: Well, the fact is that the War on Poverty really never had a chance! The money that was to be directed to rebuild America was spent on Vietnam! That brought in this new era of inflation, which hurt the economy. So lunch counters were closing as we were getting the right to sit at them; a cutback in funds for education came generally about the time we were getting the chance to get into schools in the first place. Social progress was taking place at the same time as the collapse in the auto, steel, electronics, rubber and textile industries. So we got the right to vote at about the time we lost our jobs. We got the right to vote for politicians, but we don't have the right to vote on whether or not the plants will close.

PLAYBOY: You once were a strong advocate of putting pressure on private business. Have you put that aside for now?

JACKSON: This is a political movement, and we're fighting for our share of participation in the public economy. But that does not mean that we can let private America off the hook. After all, the private economy is a three-trillion-dollar economy, and it has been crueler to women, Hispanics, blacks and Asians than the government has. These corporations have denied entry, they have denied promotions, they refuse to share in contracts for trade. They've gotten government subsidies in taxes, government contracts without obligation. If I were to list a series of priorities for black and poor people, they would be, first, to own a private business; second, to have a private job; third, to have a public job; fourth, to have public aid.

PLAYBOY: Do you favor government planning to direct corporate activities?

JACKSON: We must exert more influence over corporate behavior in this country—at least commensurate with our investment in those corporations. If we give a corporation a tax subsidy, we must then demand some return on our investment. If you put R19,200.00 in the bank, you expect to make X amount of interest. A bank can open in your community, take your money and then reserve the right to not reinvest in that community. There should be a greater sense of economic planning in this country—or a more fundamental covenant among labor, business and government.

Now, planning does not always mean controlling something; it means directing. When Reagan talks about establishing enterprise zones to end urban blight, which is his plan, he does not attach a budget to it, so he is not serious about it. But it is a plan. Reagan planned to use unemployment to fight inflation; that's why unemployment went up to almost 11 percent. His plan reduced inflation, but unemployment cost the country R575.00 billion for every percentage point it went up. There are plans every day; the question is, What are we planning? Right now, we are not planning to feed the hungry—there are 3 million more children not nourished; there are 5 million more people in poverty.

PLAYBOY: Do you identify with the European social-democratic tradition?

JACKSON: I don't know enough about it to say I identify with it; I know that I tend to identify with people who are maximizing a commitment to children and women and poor people, people who are fighting for peace, for justice, people who are fighting for the collective good—that appeals to me. But that comes under different labels everywhere, and the label is not as important to me as the essence of it is.

"There is a place to be between being completely pro-choice and completely pro-life."

PLAYBOY: You've mentioned women as participants in your Rainbow Coalition. What do women, as a group, have at stake in the struggle of poor blacks?

JACKSON: It is clear that the E.R.A. will not become a reality so long as it remains narrowly defined and dominated by white women. White women, black women, Hispanic women, underprivileged women must see their common interest in the E.R.A. as an economic-rights amendment that protects their adulthood as well as their need to have adequate wages and opportunities to protect their children, because most poor children are in a house headed by a woman without a man. In the past ten years, we've proved that we can survive without one another, but we've not proved we can win without one another.

PLAYBOY: What is your position on abortion?

JACKSON: I do not favor a legal ban on abortion, but it's a complex issue. There is a place to be between being completely pro-choice and completely pro-life. Part of my problem with it is my sensitivity about just how precious children are who are born in the lower economic strata. If my mother had had to make a case for her economic stability before having a baby, I wouldn't have been born—or if she'd had to prove there was a father in the home, which she couldn't. I'm sensitive to what that represents. On the other hand, my daughter was born six months after my wife and I were married. I understand the tensions and dynamics in these questions, so I think that to demand that people have unequivocal stands on the issue just polarizes things.

It's strange: One group says, "We love babies so much, we insist that people take no measures to prevent their being born." Another group says, "We love babies so much, they must be born under any circumstances." Yet another group says, "We love babies so much, they should arrive only under certain circumstances—certainly not without parents' having proper housing and job and so forth." So which group loves babies the most?

One solution is to begin serious education in the formative years on the power of your body. The controversy over abortion is a little like the question of nuclear war—do you react the day after or do you take measures the day before? Educate the kids the day before and you'll reduce the chances of a day after. On the other hand—it gets so strange!—what does it mean to be pro-life, to say you love life so much, and then vote against prenatal care, health care, food stamps? So it's easy to play one crowd off against another. It's ringing people's bells. Our job is to find the true common ground between pro-choice and pro-life.

PLAYBOY: You've tried to enlist gays in your coalition. But you are a Baptist minister, and many Baptists regard homosexuality as a sin. Isn't that right?

JACKSON: Well, there's a growing maturity among clergymen and a belief that we should allow God to be the ultimate judge. We must support freedom of choice, but we must remind people that they must live with the consequences of their choices. God gives us freedom of choice—that's why you have so many different denominations—and people have the right to be religious or not religious.

PLAYBOY: Well, we do and we don't. You know, we had Jimmy Carter, who told us he prayed 20 or 40 times a day; Reagan is talking again about making kids pray in school; and here you are, a Baptist minister. Do we ever get enough of you guys?

JACKSON: One can have a commitment to modern imperatives without imposing one's religious persuasion upon other people. I've found in religion, whether I'm with Hindus or Buddhists or Jews or Christians or Moslems, that I try to search for the common ground, the ecumenical spirit. Prayer is a form of discipline that I engage in and it works for me, but this is a secular nation. We have a sacred obligation to welcome the outcast, to feed the hungry and to help the needy—that is a sacred obligation—but our nation lives by the Constitution, not by the Bible.

PLAYBOY: Do you have any fears that this injection of religion into politics will get out of hand?

JACKSON: No, my fear is that secularism and indifference will get out of hand. We cannot become too obsessed with caring for the poor and the disabled and the needy and the rejected, but we can become obsessed with making money and measuring strength by military might.

PLAYBOY: How do you feel about Reagan's invoking religious appeals all the time? You're a Baptist minister, yet he's the one calling for prayer in the schools.

JACKSON: But it's hypocritical. Reagan's call is to prayer without moral obligation. We are taught in the Bible when anyone says, "Lord, Lord, am I getting to the kingdom?" that a tree shall be known by the fruit that it bears, not by the bark it wears. So Reagan, on the one hand, is for prayer in the schools, while on the other hand, he cuts the school-lunch program. He's for prayer in the schools but not for providing food for children who are poor and malnourished. The religious mandate is to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and liberate the captive and to be judged by how you treat the least of those. And my impression is that Reagan exploits people's high regard for prayer. He also exploits our sense of patriotism. When he calls upon us to be patriotic, he knows Americans are patriotic and have good reason to be. Being patriotic and dying in Lebanon should not be seen as one and the same. You can be patriotic without being foolish.

PLAYBOY: Incidentally, as a Baptist minister, do you have any qualms about appearing in PLAYBOY? Some in your faith feel somewhat puritanical.

JACKSON: This puritanical age is also a very punitive age. And it has gone to the logical conclusion. It has chosen superstition over science. But I think our country's strength has always relied on certain kinds of equal combinations—the secular and the spiritual. I think that in some sense, PLAYBOY has had this strange combination of the universal appeal of sex on the one hand and its challenging intellectual appeal—these classic Interviews—on the other; it attracts an interesting, an unusual mix of people. It's similar to this country's strength: Many people who take pride in the freedom of our secular society reject the fact that this is a secular state. To find a balance—that's the challenge of the miracle of the American experience.

PLAYBOY: Back to more mundane matters. You've expressed some bitterness about how the press has treated you—

JACKSON: I'm not sure I'm bitter about it. People generally are distrustful of the American press, because each night, for the most part, a handful of journalists impose their will on the American public. Most places you go, if you make any kind of joke or crack about the press, people start laughing or hissing or booing, because it's as if they don't have a way to strike back.

PLAYBOY: Do you feel your ties to the Arab world have been unfairly picked on? When the issue of payments by the Arab League to Push came up on the front page of The New York Times, some people around you felt that it was done deliberately. They claim The New York Times was out to get you. How do you assess that?

JACKSON: I don't know. Many people at The New York Times itself feel it was vindictive and overkill. After all, when I went to Syria, The New York Times was scathing about me in its editorials. And when I brought Goodman back, it was ungracious. It still found something wrong with my going to Syria. Even though it was within the law, the Times was less gracious than President Reagan was—far less gracious. As I recall, it did not put the photograph of Goodman on the front page, as most other papers in the world did. It has taken a definite attitude toward my campaign and what I stand for. [*The New York Times did, in fact, run the picture of Goodman on its front page.*]

"Reagan exploits our high regard for prayer. He also exploits our sense of patriotism."

PLAYBOY: Why do you think the Times has done that?

JACKSON: I think it's self-evident what the Times is doing. I just hope that the warfare will end and there will be more congenial relations.

PLAYBOY: Yet your adversaries on the question of your Arab ties will say you fired the first shot by embracing Yasir Arafat and adopting a strong pro-Arab stance during your Middle East trips.

JACKSON: When I went to the Middle East, I went to meet with Prime Minister Begin; he refused to meet with me. I wanted to meet with Arafat as well, and I went to see him to appeal to both sides for mutual recognition of the P.L.O. and Israel. The price that both sides are paying for their refusal to recognize each other is just expanded brutality—murder. No one would have thought that Begin and Sadat could sit around a table and end up with their arms outstretched to each other, all because of a personal relationship. That happened only because a leader took an aggressive position and saw more advantages in peace than in fighting.

PLAYBOY: Columnist George Will wrote a column that accused you of ignoring Syrian repression and of apologizing for President Assad—

JACKSON: I didn't apologize for Assad! That's not true! George Will was so visibly shook up by the success of the Goodman rescue mission that he was incoherent. He's not a good source. Will was hoping that we would fail, which meant he hoped Goodman would remain in jail; if he had remained in jail, he would have been war bait. That meant he could very well have been a stimulus to expand conflict between America and Syria. So Will's reaction was wholly irrational. It reminds me of people's criticizing the successful mission of Jesus when he healed a blind man one Sabbath; they complained because of the upset—they were not accustomed to reporting such

news. Except for the blind man: He could see. When all of the dust clears away, you can always say that Goodman was once in jail and now he is free. As a result, Reagan sent Assad a letter to express his thanks, and then Ambassador Donald Rumsfeld met with Assad for the first time. So our mission was to relieve the pressure—to try to open up a dialog—and we were successful.

PLAYBOY: Ever since your Syrian mission, you've had a pretty large press contingent following you. But we notice that there's a high percentage of black reporters; do you find it easier to relate to them?

JACKSON: Not necessarily. I have nothing to do with it, because I don't assign the reporters. But the black reporters do understand the nuances in the black community much better than white reporters do, for the most part. The white reporters have much to learn from black reporters on certain beats—and vice versa.

PLAYBOY: Do you think black reporters try to prove themselves by showing that they are tough and independent—and then cut you down? It was a black Washington Post reporter, Milton Coleman, who broke the news about your calling Jews Hymies, wasn't it?

JACKSON: Yes, and it was unfortunate, because it was a private, colloquial talk. That's why it wasn't even reported directly in the first story. There were a couple of other words he may have heard too. Why didn't he report them?

PLAYBOY: Such as?

JACKSON: In that conversation and others, I heard people laughingly refer to "Ay-rabs" and niggers—not in a derogatory sense, almost affectionately.

PLAYBOY: But you're not saying that if we heard Gary Hart use the word "nigger" that we shouldn't report it, are you?

JACKSON: No, if you heard any number of words like that you should report them all. But it's a matter of context. All I'm saying is that I want people to play by one set of rules.

PLAYBOY: We don't understand what you're saying. You agree we should report it if Hart were to say "Ay-rab" or "nigger," right?

JACKSON: Sure.

PLAYBOY: So shouldn't we report your using the word "Hymie"?

JACKSON: My point is, you should report all of what is said, so if you report private, colloquial use of language about Jewish people, you should also report your own use of language about black people and Arabs.

PLAYBOY: You mean the reporter used those terms.

JACKSON: Sure. Except one term is more insulting than the other.

PLAYBOY: Not to belabor this, but where did you first hear the word Hymie?

JACKSON: In South Carolina. I grew up all my life using words like Hymie, Stymie, Buckwheat—all those characters.

PLAYBOY: Buckwheat was black; Hymie was Jewish. What was Stymie?

JACKSON: I don't know. The point is, there was nothing particularly offensive about Hymie when it was used. There's a friend we have called Hymie Johnson. Since this whole thing happened, a number of Jewish people have called me to tell me that their children and cousins are named Hymie. People have to stretch to make it offensive. As literate as you are, you had to ask me what it means. Which is the point.

PLAYBOY: You clearly are the black American with the greatest recognition right now. Even though you stress that you are just a vehicle for the aspirations of your coalition, isn't it a fact that one result of this campaign will be that you will be the acknowledged national black leader?

JACKSON: No.

PLAYBOY: It's not even something you can accept or reject; isn't it just a matter of name recognition?

JACKSON: No. I'm leading the Rainbow Coalition. This is not an ethnic march; this is a political movement to pull together the strength of rejected groups so they may be able to serve more effectively and be served better by their government. That's what the real point is.

PLAYBOY: When you were in the civil rights movement, did you think you would have to go around to young blacks one day to get them to say, "I am somebody," or did you feel that simply ending legal discrimination would solve the problem?

JACKSON: One day, James Meredith came to meet with Dr. King, Ralph Abernathy and some of the rest of us and announced he was going to lead a march in Mississippi against fear. They thought he was crazy—a march against fear? Who can see fear, who can touch fear? But he led the march down the road and got shot. Remember that? He was trying to affirm something.

I was standing on the back of a truck one day in Resurrection City during the Poor People's March in 1968, and on that particular morning, it was raining, Dr. King was dead, Robert Kennedy was dead, we were really in despair. I looked down from that truck and saw black women, white women, Indian women, most of them with their babies, very few men—one boy died—some of them catching hepatitis, the government had turned its back on us; just us, nobodies! And I told those people, "Don't let them break your spirit! Repeat after me: 'I am somebody!' Say, 'I may be poor, but I am somebody. I may be on welfare, I may be unskilled, I am somebody. Respect me!' Say, 'I am more than what you see. The me that makes me me, my essence, is important; I am God's child, I am somebody!'" And it became a battle cry. People began to gain strength. Now, around the world, people have chanted that battle cry.

PLAYBOY: If this presidential race is hopeless in practical terms, will you feel personally bitter?

JACKSON: I don't have any hatred, I don't have any bitterness, and I have participated in enough victories in my life to feel good. If we were still in the back of the bus, I might be bitter. Who won that fight? We had big opposition—the Woolworth Company and its lunch counter—but we won that fight. Who won the fight against the Greyhound and Trailways bus policies? Vietnam? Open housing? Who won those fights? George Wallace stood in the door and said, "Segregation now, tomorrow and forever." We won that fight. In Little Rock, we won that fight. So, really, there are a series of victories that are so inspirational they should remove any bitterness. Our main hope is that we can keep winning.

PLAYBOY: Even if you don't win conventionally? Because if there's one thing that's said about you, it's that you don't play politics in the standard way, that you're a wild card. Anything to that?

JACKSON: I don't know. But wild cards usually beat aces, don't they?

Sometimes a Cigar Is a Just a Cigar

BY **MYCHAL DENZEL SMITH**

PHOTO BY **OXFORD_SHOT**

Desde 1875
HABANA
SHORT
HURCHILLS
HOYO
DE
MONTERREY
HABANA
EPICURE
Nº2

In the first column of our new Philosophy of Pleasure series, New York Times best-selling author Mychal Denzel Smith writes on the complexity and simplicity one can find in a long drag of a cigar

I only recently came to smoking cigars as a near-daily habit. I've enjoyed them in the past, but with all the extra time on my hands during pandemic lockdown, I finally had the chance to get "into" them. That has meant lots of research on what makes a good cigar—the various tobacco leaves and wrapper types, the countries of origin, size and shape, the heralded brands—followed by sampling a wide variety to figure out my preferences and which cigars hit the mark. Then there are the cigar accessories you need for the full experience: cutter, lighter, ashtray and humidor. As with any hobby, people seek out ways to personalize it, to reflect other parts of their personality and interests in the thing they love. As such, you can find a lot of custom variations on humidors, lighters and the like.

I didn't think much of it when I saw a picture online of a humidor and ashtray set painted with the image of Marlon Brando as Vito Corleone in The Godfather, smoking a cigar, except that maybe it was the ideal humidor for me given I love The Godfather (original, I know). I didn't think much of it again later when I came across some fan art depicting Vito in his iconic tuxedo, holding a lit cigar in his hand as the smoke rises above him. It all made sense. I could see the scene at the very beginning of the film, with Vito holding court in his office as he grants favors on the day of his daughter's wedding, quietly reflective yet still imposing and menacing. It wasn't until I was smoking a cigar myself a few days later that I realized something was off about it all: Vito never smoked.

At least not in Part I. Young Vito, played by Robert De Niro in Part II, can be seen with a small cigar a few times, but the older version's only vice is wine. The fan art with Brando's visage is the work of pure imagination. I've seen the films dozens of times, but nothing struck me as off about these fan-created images. It seemed natural. Gangsters are always smoking cigars on television and in film: Tony Soprano in The Sopranos, nearly everyone in Goodfellas, both the 1932 and 1983 versions of Scarface and so on. Indeed, when Francis Ford Coppola tricked Brando into a screen test for The Godfather role, among the props he brought with him were cigars. Gangsters and cigars go hand in hand.

It doesn't require a semester of a gender studies course to understand why this is. Cigar smoking has long been associated with a brand of masculinity neatly embodied in the gangster archetype. Hardened, stoic, a bit frightening. A cigar in hand, or expertly held in your teeth, becomes less about enjoyment of tobacco and more a statement on the kind of man you are. Cigar smokers are bosses, titans of industry, no nonsense, powerful. Fuck with them at your own peril.

I can't say how much this idea of the cigar smoker factors into the appeal for me, but it certainly isn't zero. There's something to feeling like I'm only a cut, light and draw away from the type of power that rules nations, big and small.

I know, too, that this association is part of the reason it has taken me so long to cultivate cigars as a hobby. My first cigar-smoking experience was almost a decade ago, after a chance encounter on a Brooklyn sidewalk with the founder of a website I was freelancing for at the time. He took me to a cigar lounge—one he said was frequented by Al Sharpton—and walked me through the ritual. Even with help, it took me a while to get it properly lit, then for an hour or so I made the rookie mistake of tapping the ash as if it were a cigarette. (Don't tap the ash; one sign of a well-made cigar is that it will hold the ash as you smoke it down, and it also serves to keep the cigar from burning too hot, allowing you a longer smoke time).

Still, I enjoyed it. I never thought I would be a smoker, scared as I was by my grandfather dying from lung cancer, but I couldn't deny it was one of the more relaxing activities of my young, stressful life as a broke freelancer. I hated the lounge, though. The atmosphere was pleasant enough—low lighting and comfy booths—but the clientele irked me. It would be the same at all the cigar lounges I'd visit over the next several years, whenever I got the taste for a cigar: smoky rooms where James Bond films played on a loop, filled with men who were, or imagined themselves to be, the right-

A cigar in hand, or expertly held in your teeth, becomes less about enjoyment of tobacco and more a statement on the kind of man you are.

ful inheritors of wealth, power and status. Men in khaki pants and tacky blazers who made money off the misery of others and still were able to sleep at night. My trips to cigar lounges were infrequent because I feared accidentally falling into conversation with one of these men and ruining a perfectly good cigar in the process.

It may seem as though I'm a harsh judge, and I admit that I am, but I'm also an eavesdropper and I'm only reporting what I heard. For a long time, I thought the cigar lounge was the only place I could go for a cigar, so I went only for special occasions or when the pull of the tobacco was too strong to deny.

Only recently did I get the notion that I could simply buy a cigar, learn to cut and light it and luxuriate in the pleasures of smoking all by myself. And that's what I do, sitting on the fire escape of my New York City apartment, getting lost in the blue-tinted smoke forming curlicues off the cigar's foot. I've developed an affinity for anything that comes from Padrón, Oliva or Liga Privada, especially when they have a maduro wrapper, which tends to carry notes of chocolate, coffee and sweet cedar. They can be a little spicy, too, particularly when (like all Padróns) they are made from 100% Nicaraguan tobacco. When those flavors are expertly balanced and the draw is full-bodied and the burn immaculate (like every Padrón I've ever had), it's a full sensory experience.

On my fire escape, cigar in hand, I don't imagine myself powerful. I know I'm not. But I am taking time for my mind to clear, to find peace.

On my fire escape, cigar in hand, I don't imagine myself powerful. I know I'm not. But I am taking time for my mind to clear, to find peace amid the chaos, trauma and numbness of living through a global pandemic. It's meditation.

There are, rather obviously, other things I could do to achieve this—light some incense, drink a cup of tea, take a bath, do yoga, actually meditate—and they would all be better for my long-term health than smoking cigars. I drink plenty of tea, but the proximity to death makes cigar smoking all the more alluring. It is our greatest unknown, and my biggest fear, but when I'm holding the smoke in my mouth, contemplating the potential harm it is causing, I'm able to make peace with its coming. I don't want to die, but it is inevitable, and fear of it has filled my body with anxiety for decades. For an hour or so, the cigar releases me.

Not all my thoughts are so morbid, or else I don't think I would smoke daily. But considering the end, wrapped in the billowing cigar smoke, gives me the space to think about the statement I want to make about the kind of man I'd like to be while I'm still here.

Irresistible Power

Electra Barbie

Model **@electrabarbie2.0**

Photographers **Tre Fuller | @trefuller_**
Dennis Rosenberg | @dennis_rosenberg_photography
Ian Tseng | @iantseng.md

Such an absolute honor to have you on Playboy! Tell us about yourself and your modeling journey so far. Modeling has been part of my life for over twenty years. I started young, and it grew into something much bigger than I ever imagined: runways, calendars, magazine covers, and even hosting my own photo shoot events. But modeling has never just been about the photos for me. It's been about expression, confidence, and learning how to embody different parts of myself. Over time, the journey became less about external validation and more about owning who I am and showing up authentically in my power.

What has been the most defining moment in your journey so far? Realizing that my worth was never tied to how others perceived me. There was a point where I stopped chasing approval and started honoring my own standards, my integrity, and my growth as a woman. That shift changed everything—personally and professionally.

How would you describe your personal style? Feminine, confident, and a little playful. I love embracing my sensuality while still keeping a sense of elegance. I think my style reflects who I am: strong, soft, and unapologetically myself.

Best place you have ever been to in the world? The best places for me are the ones where I feel truly alive and present. I've been lucky enough to travel, but honestly, the moments that stand out most are the ones where I felt connected to nature, to people, or to something bigger than myself.

What was the biggest lesson from your worst breakup? That love without integrity isn't love. I learned that promises mean nothing if someone's actions don't match their words. That experience taught me to trust my intuition and to value loyalty and honesty above everything.

What's a lesson you've learned that changed the way you see yourself? That my sensitivity is actually a strength. For a long time, I thought feeling things deeply made me vulnerable, but I've realized it's part of what allows me to connect with people and understand life in a deeper way.

What's one lifestyle change you made this year that completely transformed you? Being more intentional about my health and what I put into my body. I've become very aware of how the food system affects us, and I've been focused on eating cleaner and taking care of myself in a way that supports my long-term wellbeing.

What does being featured in a magazine in 2026 represent for you at this stage of your journey? It represents evolution. I'm not the same woman I was when I started modeling, and that's a beautiful thing. Being featured now feels like a celebration of growth, resilience, and stepping into the most authentic version of myself.

If you could write a letter to your younger self, what would you say? I would tell her that she doesn't need to prove her worth to anyone. Everything she's searching for externally will eventually come from within. And most importantly, I would tell her to trust her intuition sooner.

What's a lifelong dream you've held on to? Other than being in Playboy?! lol To make a positive impact on people's lives. Even when I was younger, I always wanted my life to mean something beyond just success. I wanted to bring light into the world in some way.

Looking back, what advice would you give to your younger self? Protect your peace, trust your instincts, and never compromise your values for someone else's approval.

What do people often get wrong about you? Sometimes people assume that because I'm confident or strong, things come easily for me. The truth is, a lot of who I am today was built through growth, self-reflection, and learning from difficult experiences.

Do you have any hidden talents? If so, what is it? I'm very intuitive with people. I tend to pick up on energies and emotions quickly, which helps me understand people on a deeper level.

What's one lesson from your journey that you wish you'd learned earlier? That walking away from what isn't aligned with your values is actually a form of self-respect, not failure.

What makes you the ultimate partner to have? I'm loyal, supportive, and deeply invested in the people I love. When I care about someone, I show up fully. I value honesty, growth, and building something meaningful together.

When people look back at this moment in your career, what do you hope it represents about who you are? I hope it represents a woman who stayed true to herself. Someone who grew, evolved, and used her platform not just for beauty, but for authenticity and positive impact.

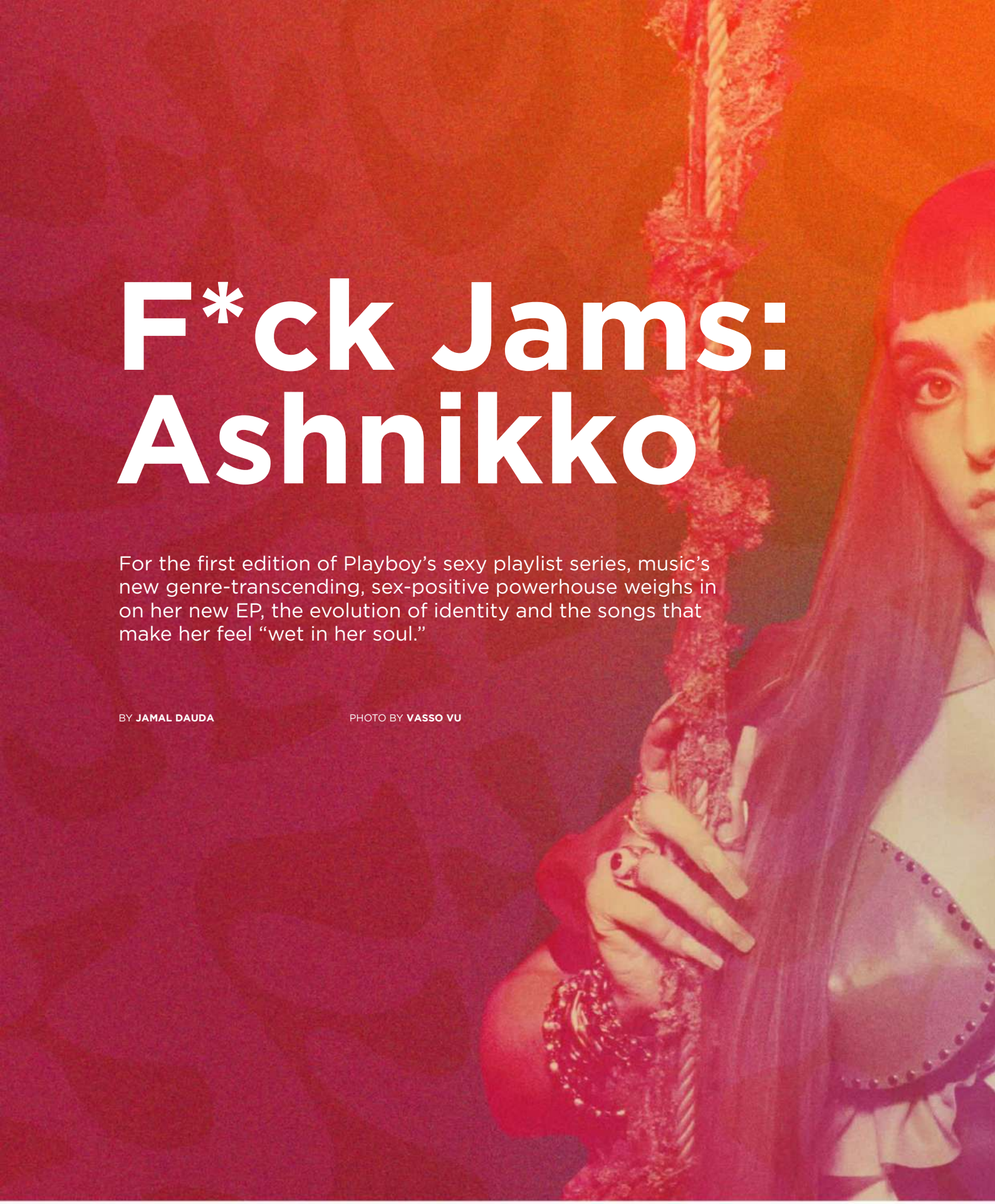
What's one goal you didn't hit last year that you're determined to achieve this time? Continuing to expand the ways I share my voice and connect with people. Whether that's through modeling, speaking, or other creative projects, I want to keep stepping into the purpose I feel called to.

F*ck Jams: Ashnikko

For the first edition of Playboy's sexy playlist series, music's new genre-transcending, sex-positive powerhouse weighs in on her new EP, the evolution of identity and the songs that make her feel "wet in her soul."

BY **JAMAL DAUDA**

PHOTO BY **VASSO VU**



When you decide to launch a playlist series called F*ck Jams, it takes more thoughtfulness than you might imagine. At its simplest, the ask is straightforward: Make a hookup playlist and don't take it too seriously. It could be your go-to throwback R&B songs that set the mood, the perfect song sequence for go time or the best Radiohead songs to cuddle to during that postcoital glow. Yet you still need someone who is in on the hilarity of it all. Someone willing to be thoughtful and vulnerable in ways that feel harder and harder to come by these days with the hyper-curation of the social media age. Lucky for us, Ashnikko is exactly the artist we need for this moment.

The 24-year-old Londoner by way of North Carolina has an innate ability to speak to profound personal truths in the same breath she reminds you that she "drew a dick on all your sweatshirts" in a post breakup fit of rage and closure. Identifying as bisexual, Ashnikko takes equal joy exalting and eviscerating past partners all across the spectrum, but always with an underlying self-awareness that reveals emotional maturity well beyond her years.

The blue-haired, anime-loving, sex-positive powerhouse has been pushing against the patriarchy since her 2018 release, Unlikeable. Brushing aside genre and lazy categorizations at every turn, she's as comfortable inhabiting the role of vigilante dominatrix over hip hop beats ("Daisy") as she is sharing a track with Grimes centered around the disintegration of a female friendship ("Cry"). Her brash, unapologetic lyrics about sex, misogyny in the music industry and the trappings of a digital-first culture (present on her newly released mixtape, Demidevil) show an exhilarating combination of humor and fearlessness that make her the perfect person to discuss pregame playlists, the joy of sex toys and the complexities of representation in media and entertainment. If you are familiar with her, it should come as no surprise that she put together a mix that is equal parts playful and sweet, while being seductive and horny at the same time. No small feat.

For the inaugural edition of Playboy's proprietary new music series, the artist tackles all of the above while taking us on a journey through a masterful weaving of her favorite tracks from Kehlani, Ty Dolla $ign, girl in red and a handful of other artists who are either already on your radar, or, as Ash puts it, sure to "make you feel it in your soul G-spot."

"I like all my songs to make me feel wet in my soul."

PLAYBOY: First and foremost, how have you been? How has quarantine been?

ASHNIKKO: I've been blessed. I'm healthy. My loved ones are healthy. I'm just trying to stay sane and learn some new crafts, like everyone else on Earth.

PLAYBOY: Some artists say, "I miss touring and I miss running around," which would make sense for you since you were pretty hot and heavy into promotional and touring mode. But then some people say, "Actually, I love just being home and making stuff." Which side are you leaning toward currently?

ASHNIKKO: In lockdown, my music has gone from zero to 100, and it's very strange to not be performing the songs that are doing really well. I almost don't have a grasp on reality. Like, I don't know how they're doing until I'll be in a cab and I'll hear the song on the radio and I'm like, "What? People like my songs?" Not having an energy exchange with people in real life is quite weird. The only way to gauge your fans' responses is through online comments, which is toxic.

PLAYBOY: How do you even begin to deal with socials? I've always been told, "Don't even look at comments. Don't even bother, don't even get in there."

ASHNIKKO: It's really bad, but I used to search my name and read the comments. I wanted to be in the know. And then one day I was just like, "I can't do this." So no, I don't read comments, or I will go crazy. I mean, on bad days I'll read them, and then it's like a spiral. It's the worst thing you can do to yourself. And then when it comes to other artists, some people are like, "I'm having such a good time. I'm writing an album and being so creative," and I'm just lying in bed like, "What am I supposed to write about? I have done nothing!"

PLAYBOY: Where are you pulling that inspiration from as an artist in a moment such as this?

ASHNIKKO: There's only so many times I can put the word "lonely" in a song. I don't even want to think about the music that's going to come out of the next year with the hot buzzwords like "lonely," "isolated," "quarantine." It's just—

PLAYBOY: Yeah. I don't think we need a wave of pandemic pop. It's probably a bit much.

ASHNIKKO: Oh my God. That's what it's going to be called.

PLAYBOY: I really hope not. If we bury that and pretend I never said it, then hopefully it won't manifest itself.

ASHNIKKO: At this point, I'm writing made-up stories. I'm like, "This happened and I'm going to write a song about it," even though I'm lying and it didn't happen at all because I have been playing Zelda in my room for eight days straight.

PLAYBOY: I think that's okay. That's called "imagination." You're allowed to do that as an artist. Considering the immersive world you've built for yourself and the way you treat your visuals as this

kind of alternate reality, you're allowed to make up lyrics and lean into fantasy, right?

ASHNIKKO: Thank you. I think there's an element of building a fantasy, almost comic book–like, character in my music as well as visually.

PLAYBOY: Did I read somewhere that you are working on a live show for streaming platforms?

ASHNIKKO: We're working on a fantastical livestream show for you all. I'm hoping for some tentacles. There's going to be some dancing. This is my first time doing choreography for a live performance. I do it on music video sets sometimes, and I always injure myself really badly. I'm kind of uncoordinated, but I'm looking forward to the challenge of being a real pop girlie. This is my dream!

PLAYBOY: Let's talk about this sweet, sweet playlist, shall we? I think sometimes people try to play it too cool, as if they're not listening to other stuff that's out there or they're not aware of other musical contemporaries. But what I love is that this is a really ahead-of-the-curve playlist. There are some people on here who you can tell are going to break any minute. You're really on your A&R tip on this.

ASHNIKKO: One day, I'm going to be an A&R executive.

PLAYBOY: What was your thought process in putting it together?

ASHNIKKO: I was thinking of different speeds—different thrust speeds. I was thinking about songs that make me feel sexy. It's not even necessarily about sex; it's more about the feeling I feel when I like a song. It's almost like I get aroused. When you hear a song and you're just like, "Oh, yes. This song makes me feel so fucking wet in my soul." That's what I'm talking about. I like all my songs to make me feel wet in

Courtesy Charlotte Rutherford

Courtesy Charlotte Rutherford

my soul, you know?
PLAYBOY: Yes, absolutely. I think that's generally a good sign.
ASHNIKKO: Yeah. Your G-spot. Your soul G-spot, you know? That's all I have to say.
PLAYBOY: You did an awesome job of balancing out the vibe. I remember someone saying to me once, "There are people who sing about sex and people who make inherently sexy music, and those aren't necessarily the same thing." You are also drawn to interesting vocal melodies. The production styles are all over the place, but there's a lot of beautiful vocals here. Like the Shygirl track—the way she delivers "Bawdy" is unique.
ASHNIKKO: Shygirl is really cool. I love her. It's sexy and it's sexual. I think we can put all the songs on here into two categories.
PLAYBOY: That's exactly what I love. There's a balance, where you have Big Sean and Ty Dolla, which are more explicit lyrically, and then some songs that are a bit more nuanced.
ASHNIKKO: But with Ty's melodies, it doesn't matter what he's singing. They're sexy. I said a while ago in an interview, "Ty Dolla $ign could sing, 'Pee, pee, poo, poo, diarrhea,' and I would love it."
PLAYBOY: I was talking to a friend recently about the contrast between the male and female gaze in film, and how you can feel the difference when a female director shoots love scenes versus a male one. Does the same thing apply to songwriting? Do you think men and women write about relationships in inherently different ways?
ASHNIKKO: I feel like there have been songs that are written by women but are very much for the male gaze, full of tropes. I have a song on my new mixtape called "Slumber Party." I was playing with those tropes a little bit, kind of as a joke. Now it's on the mixtape and already pressed to vinyl; the other day, I was like, "Oh my God. What if people don't understand that I was just making fun of tropes in pop music when women talk about being with other women?" I was up until like 4 A.M. thinking about it.
PLAYBOY: I wouldn't worry too much. I think your track record speaks for itself. The way you've handled the topic of queer sexuality in your songwriting and talking about feminism in a genuinely intersectional way on socials. I think people would be hard-pressed to accuse you of being disingenuous.
ASHNIKKO: The internet can do anything though. This is one thing I've learned this year. I can't control it and I just have to let go. What people think about me is really just none of my business.
PLAYBOY: And it doesn't mean they're right.
ASHNIKKO: Yeah, but I definitely agree that there are a lot of performative queer-baiting songs in pop music.
PLAYBOY: Agreed, but you managed to lean into a few songs in this playlist that are very much not that. They are sweet and genuine, like the two girl in red tracks and Kehlani's "Honey." Really sincere and kind of universal stories.
ASHNIKKO: I love girl in red. I actually am realizing that I meant to put girl in red's "two queens in a king sized bed" on this list.
PLAYBOY: You did! You ended the whole thing with it.
ASHNIKKO: Oh, did I? Okay, cool. All right. Good!
PLAYBOY: You also threw a new Megan Thee Stallion song in there. Meg and SZA. And these choices make sense, because, like the three artists we're talking about, you feel like part of this really amazing continuum that's happening right now, in which, much to the chagrin of the people who have preconceived notions about what women in music should be discussing, women are talking about and owning their sexuality. Are you very open about sexuality in your life generally, or is it just in these songs?
ASHNIKKO: If you asked any of my friends, they'd be like, "Ash really goes into full detail about her sex life." I just don't have any filter when it comes to that. I don't think there's any taboo. For me, it's just a very natural part of being alive.
PLAYBOY: Why is it seemingly so intimidating for men when women own it? You can talk about a dick all day, but why is it weird when you want to talk about the female G-spot?
ASHNIKKO: I mean, you see in Hollywood films that when men cum, the rating is usually PG-13. Ejaculation can still make it into a PG-13 movie, but as soon as you see women owning their own pleasure, it's an issue. You see women wearing a bra mid-sex. I've never worn a bra during sex in my life. Just so, so weird. I think my desire to talk about my sexuality probably stemmed from being from the South. I'm from a conservative small town where it was definitely very hush-hush, very sinful to touch your clitoris. My mom has actually been quite open with me about it, but other family members are very conservative, very prudish when it comes to that stuff.

For a while, I was convinced that my own sexuality was quite sinful. That's what people around me told me. It's really embarrassing now to think back on it, but it took me so long to finally admit to myself and to finally come out. I think now I'm very outspoken because I don't want other young people to feel that way. I think representation is so important.

"It's not even necessarily about sex; it's more about the feeling I feel when I like a song."

Do you remember Naya Rivera? She played a queer character on Glee, and I was really sad when I found out she had passed. I feel like a lot of us block out difficult parts of our childhood. A memory came to me of being 12 or 13 and really struggling with being attracted to my best friend, and being mad at myself about that and thinking I was sinful. Then seeing Naya Rivera on Glee, I was really happy and I remember showing my mom an episode of the show and being like, "See? She likes girls."

PLAYBOY: I've heard similar stories from so many people I know. If you're talking about sexuality, race or gender, as humans, there is something about seeing yourself in art, sports, culture—all throughout society—in a way that's celebrated. It makes all the difference when you're trying to figure out who you are and where you sit in the midst of it all.

ASHNIKKO: Exactly. I'm still figuring out my sexuality and learning new things about my own pleasure and my body. You know, just learning about myself all the time. It's nice to hear songs and see pop stars talk about their queerness in a very honest, non–male gaze-y way.

PLAYBOY: People can go their entire lives without prioritizing or trying to figure out their own sense of pleasure and what makes them happy and how to communicate it. It can be a lifelong journey, and it can change frequently.

ASHNIKKO: I think it being a lifelong journey is very important because some people think they have to be one thing forever, that they can't learn about themselves.

PLAYBOY: Or can't unpack things slowly. You start off in one place in life and you think it's fundamentally who you are, but we all have doubts or these quiet voices we don't always listen to or understand. As you learn about other peoples' experiences and put yourself in new situations, you evolve. It's a really magical part of being human. We can go through metamorphosis in ways that surprise even ourselves.

ASHNIKKO: I've always been into sex toys, from when I was, like, 18 years old—as soon as I could go into the 18-plus part of Cyberdog. I was like, "I am getting a vibrator. I am going to try it out." I think over lockdown, it gave me a real opportunity to get into sex toys, which was really cool. I was like, "I'm 24 years old and I'm learning new things about my body." I would like to think I can learn about my body and my sexuality for my entire life, and evolve.

PLAYBOY: Do you ever think about which of your own tracks people are most likely to hook up to?

ASHNIKKO: Which of my songs do I think people will fuck to? I think "Halloweenie." "You've never had a love like me / Never hit a drug like me, fuck like me / She'll never eat the butt like me / Only tricks for your ass, it's Halloween." I had someone message me saying that they lost their virginity to that song.

PLAYBOY: And there you have it!

ASHNIKKO: On the flip side of that, I make music about sex positivity with sexual themes, but I get a lot of unsolicited sexual messages from people, which is really kind of gross. A lot of girls send me really, really explicit videos. They're like, "You make me feel so powerful," and they're like jacking off. I'm like, "No, don't send me that." There's a quote I read online from the artist Bobby Lynn: "Unfriendly reminder: I may sexualize myself, but that doesn't mean it's open season for you to send me inappropriate or gross DMs." I saw this yesterday and thought, "That."

PLAYBOY: I wholeheartedly agree. I know we're probably running out of time, so I'm going to end our talk with this: I was doing my normal rounds on Reddit—the Old Testament of the internet, as I like to call it.

ASHNIKKO: Oh, gosh. The Old Testament of the internet. I'm using that. Sorry. That was good.

PLAYBOY: All yours. I saw this hilarious post in a music forum where people talk about what makes a song sexy. People started rattling off all of these random things, so I'm going to name things and you can just quick-hit tell me: Does this make a song sexy for you?

ASHNIKKO: Okay.

PLAYBOY: Falsetto?

ASHNIKKO: Not for me.

PLAYBOY: Opening with a hot take, I like it. Saxophone?

ASHNIKKO: No.

PLAYBOY: Breathing noises?

ASHNIKKO: Yes.

PLAYBOY: Reverb?

ASHNIKKO: Yes.

PLAYBOY: Cowbell?

ASHNIKKO: No.

PLAYBOY: Banjo?

ASHNIKKO: Yes. Yes.

PLAYBOY: Really?

ASHNIKKO: I love the banjo. Also, the steel guitar.

PLAYBOY: Slide guitar is money.

ASHNIKKO: Love that.

PLAYBOY: Well, that's it. That's all I got for you.

BE SEEN.
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SARA BLAKE

Model **@onlysarablake**

Happy to have you on Playboy. Any exciting projects lined up this year? Thank you for having me. Life has been crazy the last year since launching Ballers. I started a subscription-based platform for athletes in November. I've been recruiting for that, traveling, and then also launched my show, One of the Boys. With all that I'm on the go, everywhere.

What first inspired you to start your career, and how did you take the first step? I'm a huge believer in chasing your dreams, always. Just because I'm a mom doesn't mean I can't have it all if I want. We have one life on this earth, so whatever it is, I can have a career with them by my side. My inspiration comes from Chandler, Camden, Corey, and Carson, my kids. It also comes from being loved properly, without Matt, without his support and dedication to me, I couldn't have done all this, this way.

What's a defining moment in your career that changed everything for you? This question is really hard to answer for me. I don't feel like I've had my defining moment yet because I'm working so hard to make my new dream with Ballers come true. But I'd say it was the moment I decided to be fearless with sharing exactly who I was and just being myself, with that, it was accepting what my journey is and what I can make it.

What are your go-to habits or routines that keep you feeling your best? I HAVE to start my day off working out. Nothing makes me feel better. I love a 40-minute stair master session, followed by the sauna. Then straight to tan. I'm sporty as hell, but I'm also super glam. If I gotta break a nail to wakeboard, I will. But I want to look good doing it!

What part of your journey are you most proud of right now? I can honestly say, right now, the person I am, in the moment I'm living, is the most proud I've ever been. I've come a long way. I've never really shared a lot of my journey, but my mom never wanted me. I never had a family; I was always shuffled around and was abused physically, sexually, and emotionally. I ended up getting married young in another abusive situation, losing a baby, and never really knew my worth. I learned to love myself, accept the life I had, and live freely, unapologetically moving forward. Being able to have strength and being able to love is what I'm most proud of in my journey.

How would you describe your lifestyle in three words right now? Absolute f*cking chaos.

What advice would you give to someone trying to follow in your footsteps? Do it for yourself. Don't ask others what they think, don't second-guess yourself, don't listen to anybody. Do what you want and how you want it. If you do that, you will never fail.

What goals or projects are you currently working toward? Right now, I'm trying to decorate my house, master the art of balancing mom life with my career, and have a banging body. When I said my life is absolute f*cking chaos, I was home last month a total of 8 days. I'm taking my kids to a lot of games to hang out and meet the athletes I get to work with, so I'm still with them, but being at home, cooking, cleaning, decorating, and accepting the fact that my life isn't normal, it's tough. My goal is to get on a schedule, one day! lol.

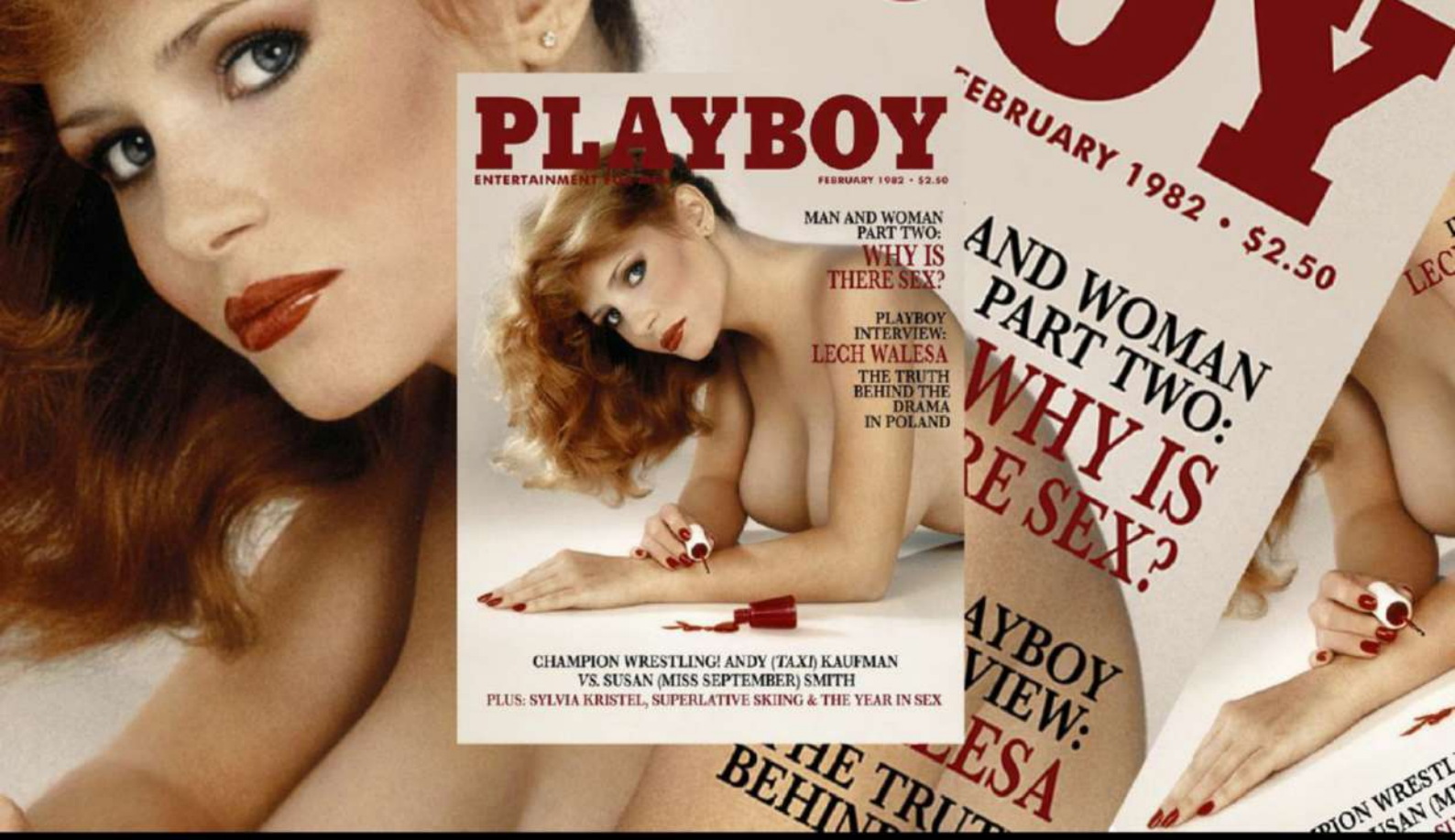
What's a lesson you've learned that changed the way you see yourself? I read something one day that said, in high school, you would look at yourself today and think Wow! She's a badass. I have to remind myself of that when I feel like I'm not where I want to be yet because of how far I've truly come. I would have never imagined my life this way, and I couldn't have planned this.

Is there a skill or hobby you've recently picked up or want to learn soon? I started golfing. My boobs are so big, so naturally I want to master the art of having big boobs, being an expert golfer, and kick ass.

Are there any habits you want to leave behind as you step into a new chapter? I want to be more kind to myself and less hard. I want to love my husband with all of me. Sometimes I get so caught up in past traumas of feeling or thinking I'm not lovable, I want to trust in my heart and myself more. Deep, I know. I'm a Sagittarius.

What's one lifestyle change you made this year that completely transformed you? Saying NO. I've said yes to anything and everything, sometimes gotten into situations I would never put myself in, but I'm in such a good place career-wise that I actually love saying no; it feels good to know the value of your time.

What's one lesson from your journey that you wish you'd learned earlier? Timing is everything. Don't force anything; if you want it, it'll happen. But trust in yourself and time. There is a reason for everything.



Behind the Cover: February 1982

A look inside PLAYBOY's February 1982 issue

WRITTEN BY
LIZ SUMAN

In February 1982, Olivia Newton-John ruled the airwaves, the San Francisco 49ers were the team to beat and the Commodore 64 computer was the new kid on the block. Between the covers of our February 1982 edition, PLAYBOY readers discovered a cheerleading Playmate, a political revolutionary, intergender wrestling and intellectual debates about sex and the sexes.

February 1982 wasn't the first time PLAYBOY readers met cover star Kimberly McArthur. The charming southerner, Dallas Cowboys cheerleader finalist and aspiring actor made her sizzling PLAYBOY debut the previous month as the magazine's January 1982 Playmate before going on to grace our cover.

"It's something I've been doing all my life," McArthur told PLAYBOY of her goal to become a professional entertainer. "If someone I know is really down, I'll launch into a brogue, do a whole skit. You should see me do a five-minute version of The Wizard of Oz. I play all the parts."

"Violets are blue and roses are red, but the best colors lie in the pages ahead."

McArthur's simple yet sexy red-and-white cover was a fitting visual introduction to a February issue that was sprinkled with nods to Valentine's Day, without hitting readers over the head with a Hallmark-size hammer. The choice was a conscious one, cheekily acknowledged by editors in the beginning of the issue: "Violets are blue and roses are red, but the best colors lie in the pages ahead."

That's not to say there weren't a few romance-centric pieces in the table of contents. They included: Stolen Sweets, a collection of illustrations by British cartoonist Francis "Smilby" Smith; At Long Last, Lover, a pictorial featuring Sylvia Kristel, the prolific Dutch actress best known as the lead in the French erotic film series Emmanuelle; and Modern Screen Romance, a tech story with an opening spread that featured Back to the Future-era electronics surrounding a bare derriere.

Non-V-Day centerpieces included Foxy Lady, a pictorial starring February 1982 Playmate Anne Marie Fox and a Playboy Interview featuring Polish Solidarity labor leader (and future Polish president) Lech Walesa, which was conducted in Poland, in Polish. The subject of that issue's installment of the recurring franchise 20 Questions was the soulful-eyed, brunette bombshell Karen Allen, Harrison Ford's counterpart in Steven Spielberg's 1981 box office sensation Raiders of the Lost Ark.

Other standouts: We Wuz Robbed!, a hybrid pictorial-sports story that spotlighted a match between September 1981 Playmate Susan Smith and "Intergender Wrestling Champion of the World" Andy Kaufman. The piece was reported by longtime contributing editor John Blumenthal, who came to PLAYBOY in the early 1970s by way of Esquire—and a referral from none other than literary and cinematic giant Nora Ephron.

For the reader whose athletic tastes veered toward more time-tested indoor/outdoor sports, the issue also ran an excerpt from Playboy's Guide to Ultimate Skiing, courtesy of Playboy Press, as well as the 1982 edition of PLAYBOY's long-standing annual franchise, The Year in Sex. And for the working man of the 1980s, a Playboy Advisor column weighed in on sex manuals and men's suits.

This issue also included the second installment of the mag's buzzworthy Man and Woman series, in which filmmaker Jo Durden-Smith and "new science" journalist Diane deSimone discussed The Sexual Deal: A Story of Civilization.

Believe it or not, that's not all 1982 had to offer. Read on to enjoy a visual tour of some of our favorite vintage February moments, including previously unpublished outtakes that didn't make it to the printer in 1982.

Southern Star

Previously unpublished outtakes from the pictorial that led to the issue's cover. Subtle differences from the published version include shots without the nail polish that housed the issue's hidden Rabbit Head.

Hidden Hare

Fun fact: Nearly every cover of PLAYBOY features a concealed image of our ubiquitous bow-tied mascot—and February 1982 was no exception. That issue's hidden hare? The ruby-red Rabbit Head reflected in McArthur's nail polish.

Foxy Lady

Twinkle toes, with a twist. A selection of outtakes from February 1982 Playmate Anne Marie Fox's fitness-inspired pictorial, which was aptly titled Foxy Lady. When Playboy reconnected with Fox in 2019, she cited this photoshoot as the experience that jump-started her future career as a photographer. "Although I didn't realize it at the time, my first experience in front of the camera catalyzed what would become my passion for working behind it," she said.

After PLAYBOY, Fox graduated from Columbia University and apprenticed with photography legends Brigitte Lacombe and Nan Goldin. A few years later, she was tapped as the set photographer for Kenneth Branagh's Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. The specific assignment? "Capture the daily intensive prosthetics transformation of the lead actor, Robert De Niro."

Hello, Lover

Scenes from At Long Last, Lover, a pictorial starring Sylvia Kristel as Lady Constance Chatterley in the first film adaptation of D.H. Lawrence's scandalous 1927 novel, Lady Chatterley's Lover. Although Kristel's breakout role was years earlier in the 1974 French film Emmanuelle, her turn as "the love-starved wife of an impotent nobleman" marked her first major cinematic role. And acting chops weren't the Dutch star's only impressive skill: Kristel had a reported I.Q. of 164 and was fluent in five languages

Illos From the Issue

Like many artists who have appeared in PLAYBOY's pages, John Kurtz, the mastermind behind the opening visuals for Robert Silverberg's February 1982 fiction piece, Gianni, hailed from PLAYBOY's birthplace: Chicago. Kurtz's work also appeared in PLAYBOY's sister publication, Oui magazine.

In addition to playing a defining role in the pop art canon, Patrick Nagel was a prolific contributor to PLAYBOY's pages. Case in point: The triptych above spotlights three Nagel contributions to the February 1982 issue alone, featured in Playboy After Hours, Playboy Forum and the Playboy Advisor, respectively.

Service With Style

Although grooming trends in pictorials are a consistently reliable way to pinpoint the decade in which any given issue of PLAYBOY was published, readers in search of additional context clues that this particular issue was published in the 1980s need look no further than the subtitle of the February 1982 tech story Modern Screen Romance, which read: "Video's sexy second generation of cassette recorders, disc players, cameras and stereo TVs is a seductive sequel that's a sure tune-on."

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